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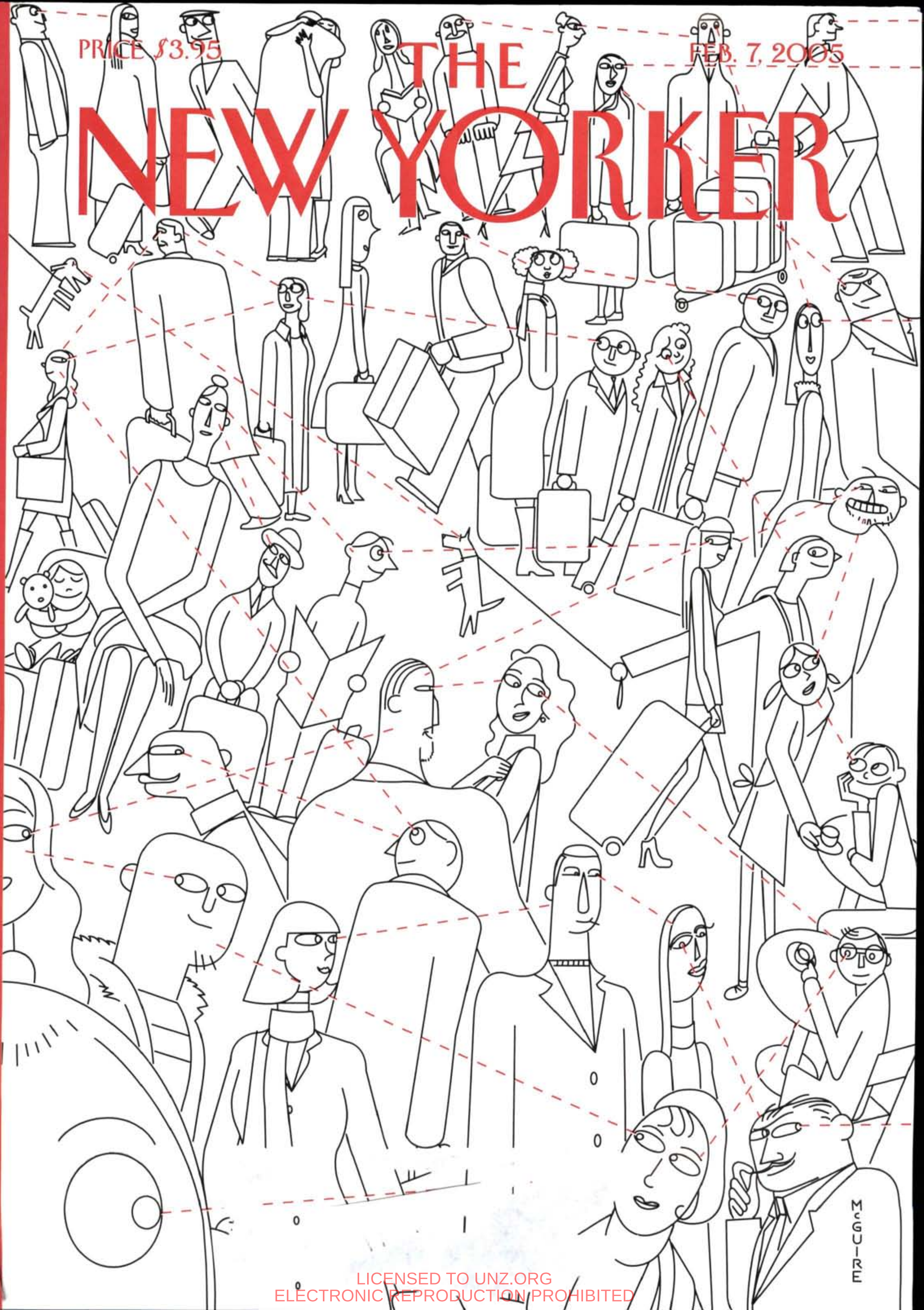

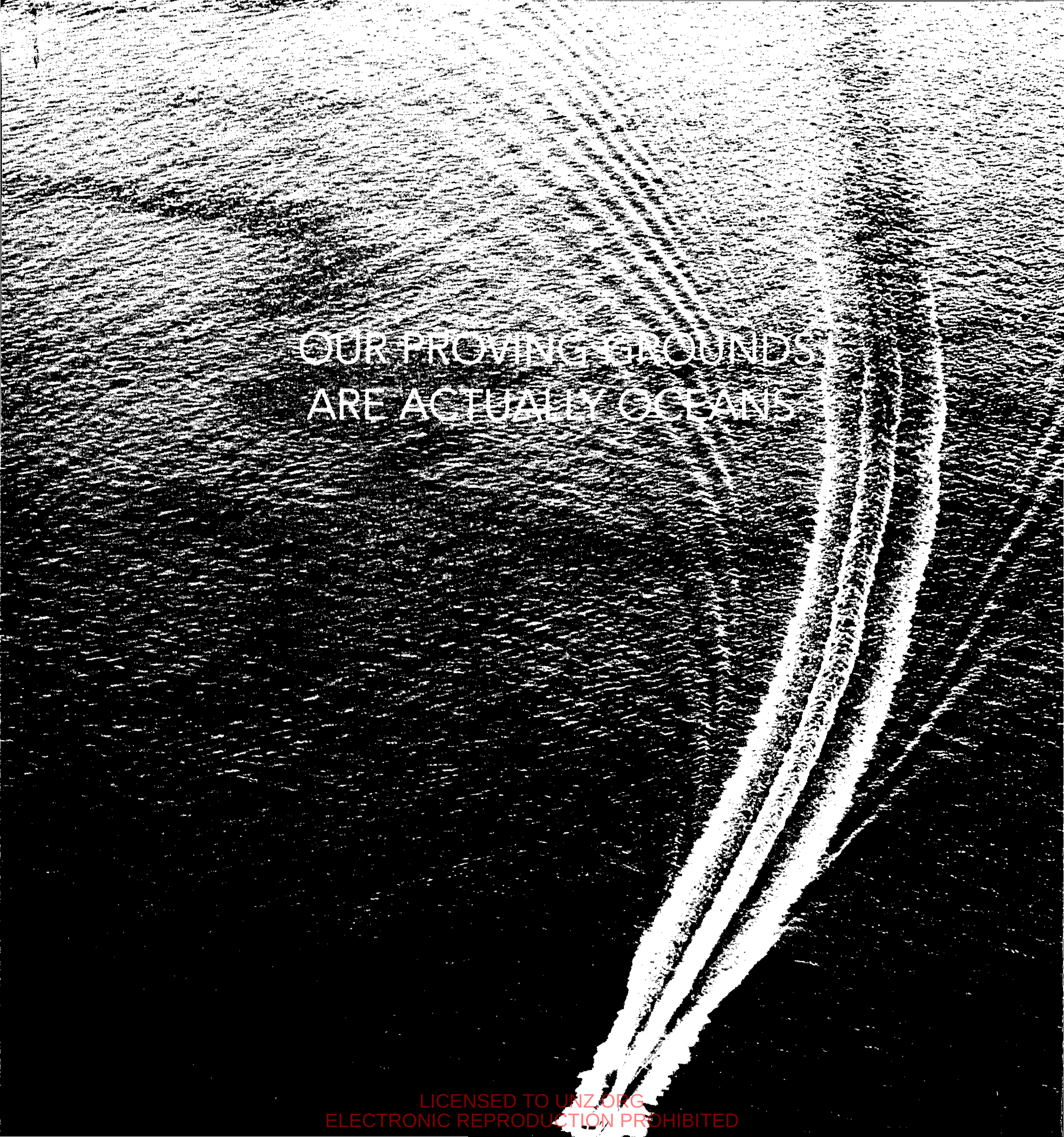
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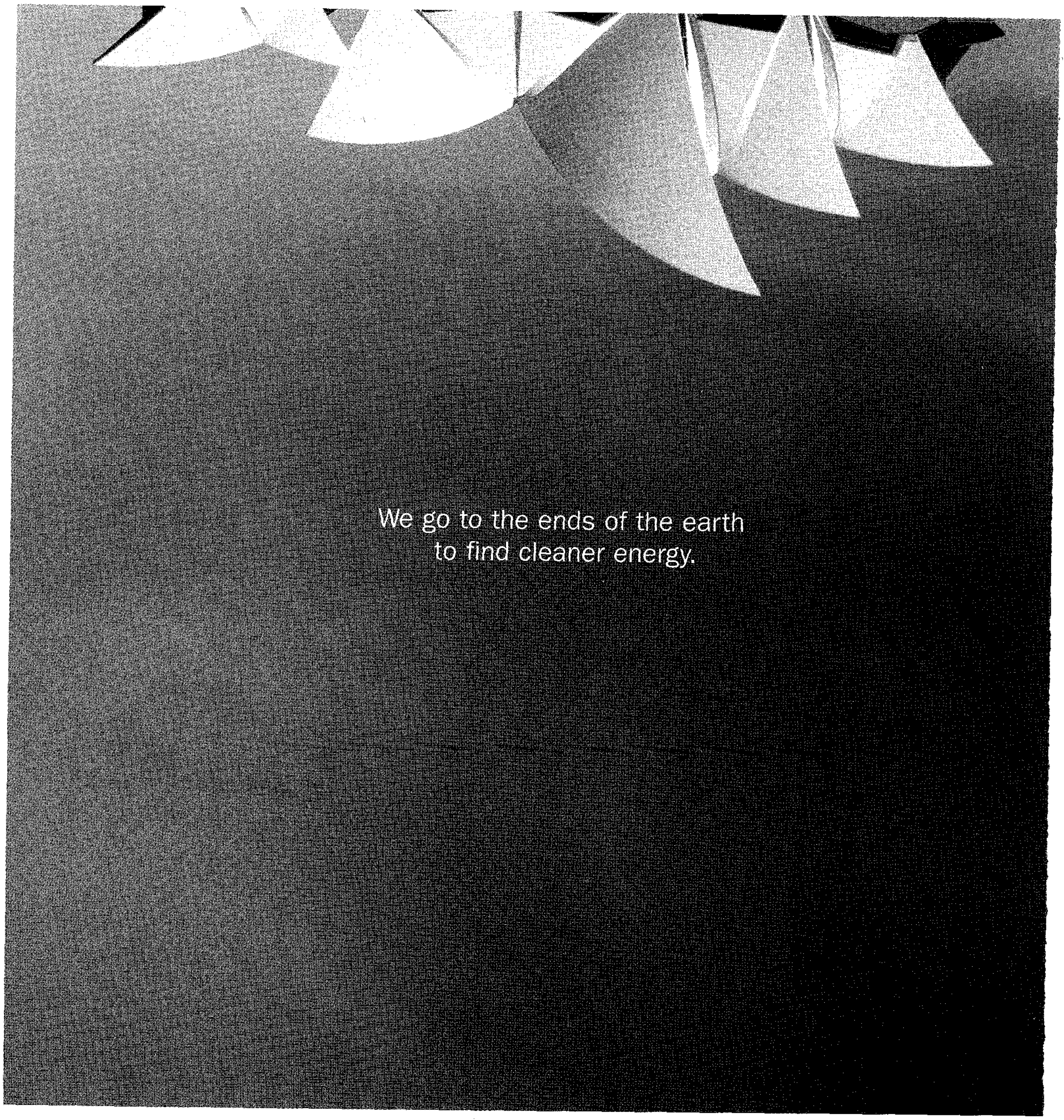
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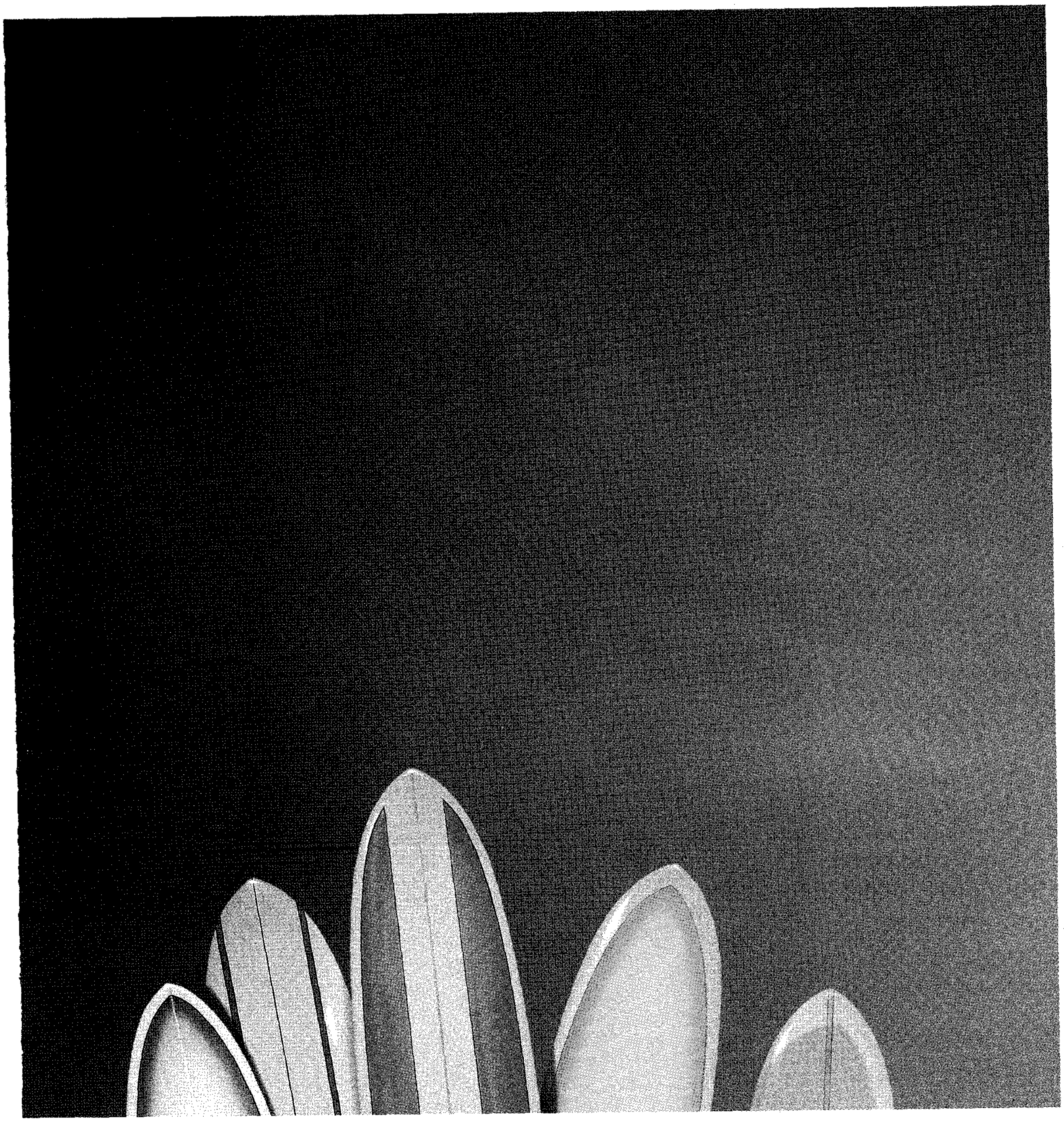

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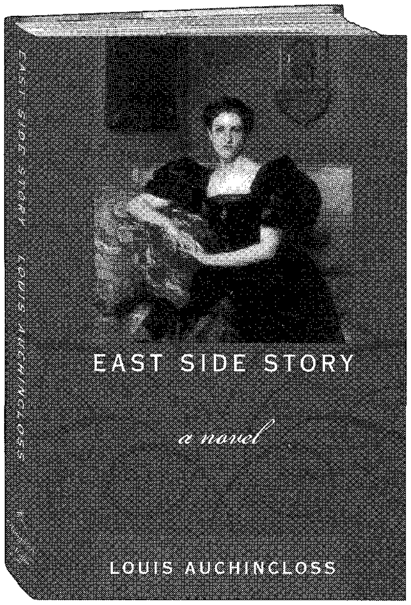
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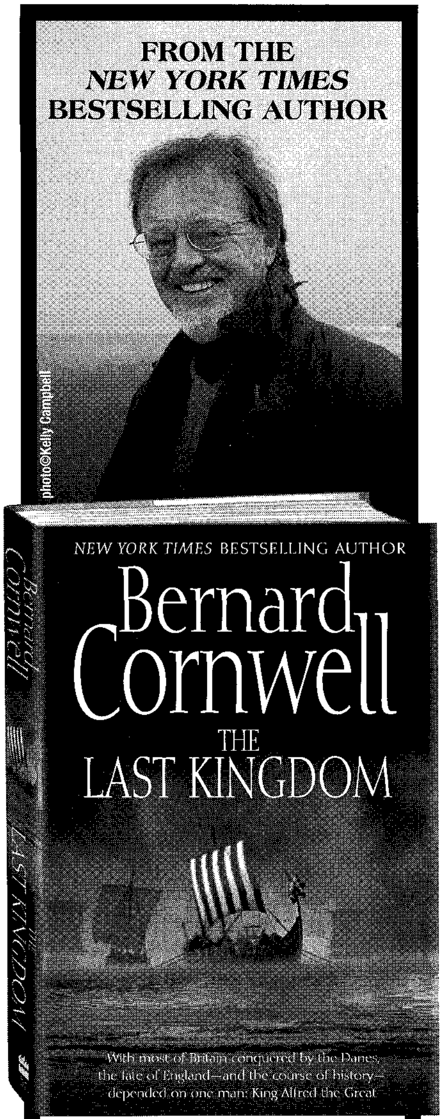
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THE LAST KINGDOM
With most of Britain conquered by the Danes, the fate of England—and the course of history—depended on one man: King Alfred the Great

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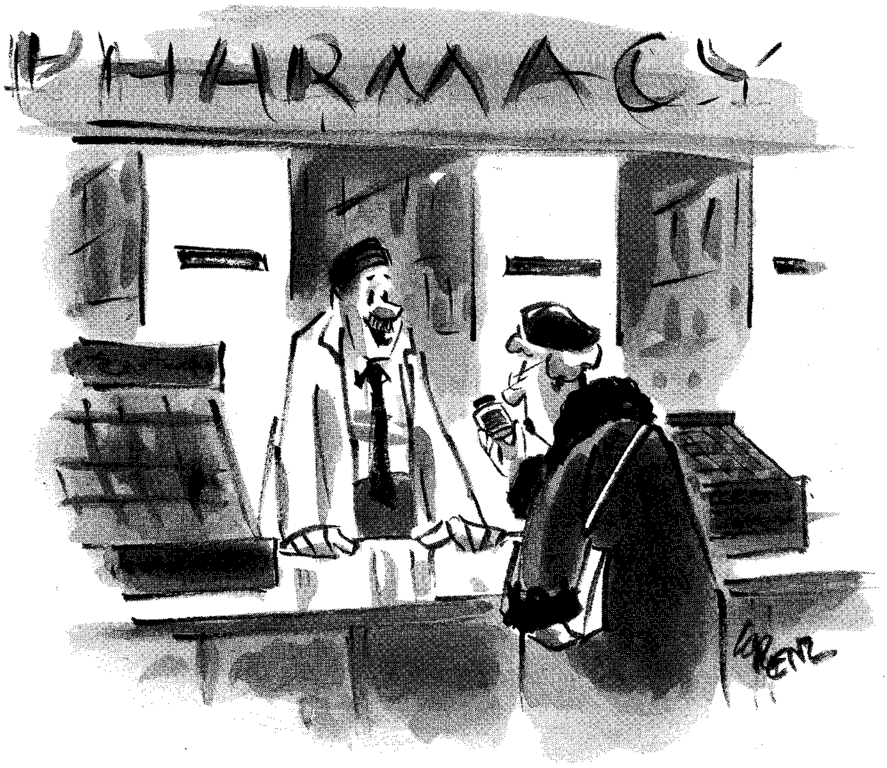
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DISORDER OF THE DAY

Alix Spiegel's account of the development of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* ("The Dictionary of Disorder," January 3rd) lays bare one of the manual's main shortcomings; namely, the medicalization of normal human emotions. This problematic trend was illustrated in the aftermath of September 11th, when epidemiologists assessed population risks for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The Harvard professor Richard McNally observed that, to be classified as "substantially stressed," respondents in one study had only to experience "quite a bit" of anger at Osama bin Laden. Under the circumstances, labelling anger, fear, or upsetting thoughts as "symptoms" of PTSD was akin to saying that coughing in a smoky tavern was a symptom of bacterial pneumonia. Yet such illogical leaps increasingly inform our cultural narrative for describing difficult emotions. The psychiatrist Derek Summerfield has critiqued the "invention" of PTSD, and cautions us to "beware the limitations of looking at the world through a medico-therapeutic prism." The ever-expanding reach of the *DSM* gives cause for concern, when a psychiatric model of illness is created to explain the very emotions that make us human.
Gerald M. Rosen
Seattle, Wash.

In a single suggestive phrase, Spiegel's article on the *DSM* sums up many of the reasons that I left the active practice of psychiatry: "the collective fantasy that the *DSM* was a genuine scientific tool." To any self-questioning practitioner, it became hard to avoid the conclusion that the *DSM-III* and the *DSM-IV* were pretend-science—desperate attempts by psychiatry to achieve legitimacy within the field of medicine. One of the main flaws of the *DSM* was to decontextualize human behavior. Many psychiatrists, by assuming that the validity of their categories exists a priori, have been deluding themselves. The *DSM*, with its elaborate descriptions of abnormal behaviors, contributes to the medicalization of many social problems and personal idiosyncrasies, leaving the mental-health professional wondering what constitutes normal behavior.
Hunter Yost
Tucson, Ariz.

Spiegel quotes Robert Spitzer, the veteran editor of the *DSM*, as lamenting that unreliability in psychiatric diagnosis is "still a real problem, and it's not clear how to solve the problem." The first steps toward a solution are very clear. A big part of the problem is that the manual presents diagnosticians with a choice of almost three hundred minutely differentiated mental-illness classifications. It is hard to think of any branch of medicine in which a single clinician would be competent to identify and treat hundreds of truly discrete diseases. The American Psychiatric Association needs to winnow the list by lumping similar mental-health problems together. We are in an era when measurement, consistency of practice, and documentation guide both quality assurance and financial control in health care. The discipline of psychiatry needs to demonstrate that it can play by these rules.
Neil Weisfeld
Princeton, N.J.

IT AIN'T NECESSARILY SO

One of the signature examples of George Gershwin's genius, Claudia Roth Pierpont suggests, is the glissando clarinet riff that opens "Rhapsody in Blue." But, since the instrumental versions of "Rhapsody"—whether for a Whiteman-size band or for a fuller orchestra—were the work of the arranger Ferde Grofé, should we really credit Gershwin for that inspiring touch?
Joel Darmstadter
Bethesda, Md.

•

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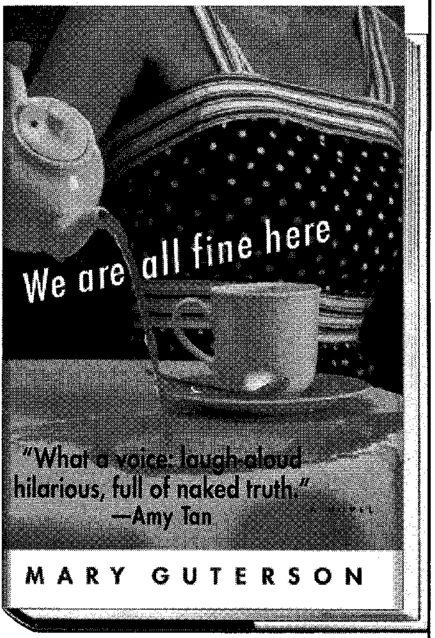

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THIS WEEK

KEYED UP

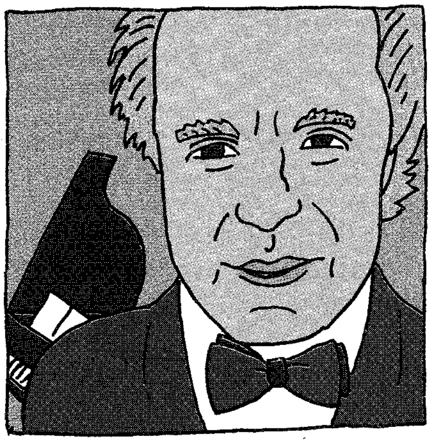
Does anyone play Schubert more persuasively than Paul Badura-Skoda? At seventy-seven, the Viennese-born Badura-Skoda is one of the great survivors of the classical-piano world. Other artists may have surpassed him in technique, but none can manage his combination of playful melancholy, rhythmic freedom, and elegant authority. This week, the pianist will take to the stage of the Austrian Cultural Forum's sleek little concert hall for an all-Schubert evening that includes the Sonata in A Major, D. 959. (Feb. 4; see Classical Music.)

BACK FROM THE CIRCUS

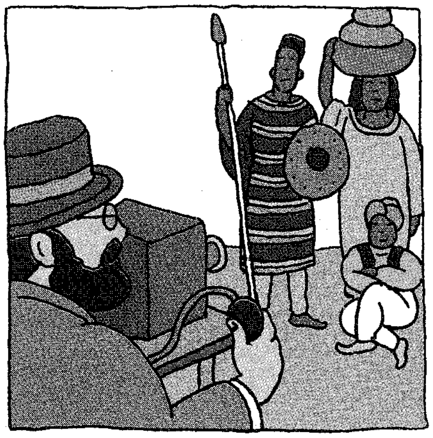
The otherworldly singer-songwriter Lhasa de Sela, who records and performs under her first name, was born in upstate New York, lives in Montreal, and appears in New York City only rarely. Lhasa, who sings in French, Spanish, and English, has been a star in Canada and overseas since 1997, when she released her début album, "La Llorona," a collection of passionate and mournful songs. After touring in support of the record, Lhasa took a break from the music business and joined a French circus. She's back, though, with a new album, "The Living Road," another collection of achingly beautiful ballads. (Satalla, Feb. 5; see Night Life.)

PICTURING THE EXOTIC

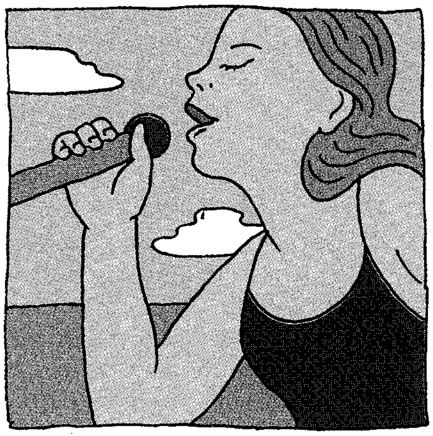
The Dahesh Museum of Art follows its exhibit of the ethnographic sculptures of Charles Cordier with "First Seen: Photographs of the World's Peoples, 1840-1880." Some two hundred and fifty images illustrate how early photography was used to document anthropological curiosities: there are Chinese women with bound feet, Cossack hunters with a felled tiger, a Javanese sultan and sultana. Even the stagiest images, the ones plainly contrived to appeal to the romantic fantasies of the folks back home, are revealing in their fictions. (Opens Feb. 1; see Art.)



Paul Badura-Skoda plays piano at the Austrian Cultural Forum.



Anthropological images from the early days of photography, at the Dahesh.



The Montreal-based singer and songwriter Lhasa performs at Satalla.

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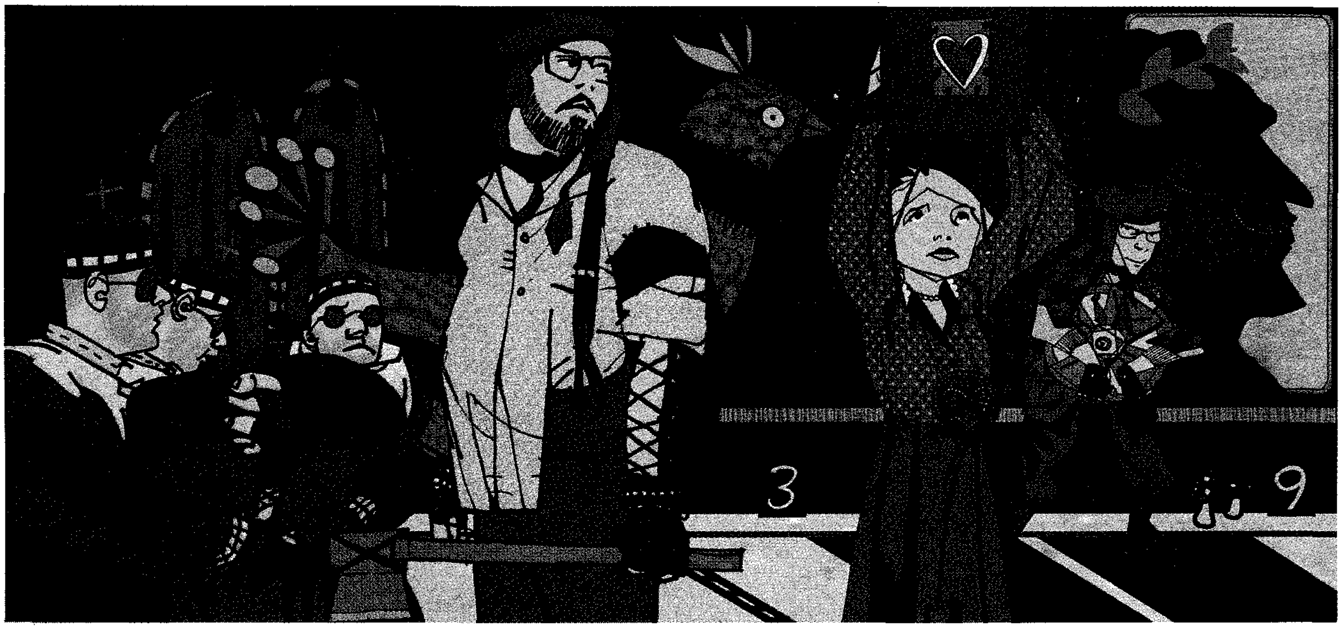
BROOKLYN BOY
Manhattan Theatre Club presents a new play by Donald Margulies ("Dinner with Friends"), about a writer whose character is changed by success. With Adam Arkin and Polly Draper. Directed by Daniel Sullivan. One preview on Feb. 2. Opens Feb. 3 at 7. (Biltmore, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

SLEEPING BEAUTY
London's Young Vic Theatre Company brings its inventive, richly visual staging of Charles Perrault's classic to New York in a production that accents the dark side of the fairy tale and is meant for both young and grownup audiences. Directed by Rufus Norris. Feb. 4-27. (New Victory, 209 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

THE 25TH ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE
A new musical by William Finn ("Falsettos") and Rachel Sheinkin sets the travails of six young orthographic geniuses and their anxious adult entourages to music. Directed by James Lapine. In previews. Opens Feb. 7 at 6:45. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)



Richard Foreman's latest phantasmagoria, "The Gods Are Pounding My Head! (Lumberjack Messiahs)," now playing at the Ontological Theatre at St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, stars Jay Smith, Charlotta Mohlin, and T. Ryder Smith.

IASHAR AWAN

THE CHERRY ORCHARD
Christopher McElroen's adaptation of the Chekhov masterpiece for the Classical Theatre of Harlem stars Earle Hyman and Wendell Pierce. Directed by McElroen. Feb. 3-27. (H.S.A. Theatre, 645 St. Nicholas Ave., near 141st St. 212-868-4444.)

DIRTY ROTTEN SCOUNDRELS
The comic film has become a musical, created by the trio who translated "The Full Monty" to the stage: David Yazbek (music and lyrics), Jeffrey Lane (book), and Jerry Mitchell (choreography). John Lithgow, Norbert Leo Butz, and Sherie Rene Scott lead the cast. Directed by Jack O'Brien. In previews. (Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

HAPPY DAYS
Lea DeLaria and David Greenspan star in the Worth Street Theatre Company's production of Samuel Beckett's dark farce about the emptiness of existence. Directed by Jeff Cohen. In previews. (Classic Stage, 136 E. 13th St. 212-279-4200.)

ON THE MOUNTAIN
In a new drama by the young playwright Christopher Shinn—named for the working title of Kurt Cobain's final song—an aging rock-and-roll wild child is haunted by the memory of her dead lover, a Seattle rock legend. Starring Amy Ryan, Alison Pill, and Ebon Moss-Bachrach. Directed by Jo Bonney ("Fat Pig"). Previews begin Feb. 4. (Playwrights Horizons Mainstage, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

SABINA
Marin Ireland stars in a revival of Primary Stages' production of Willy Holtzman's play about Sabina Spielrein, a mentally ill woman who was treated by Jung (Victor Slezak) and later became a pioneering doctor, working with Jung and Freud (Peter Strauss). Directed by Ethan McSweeny. Opens Feb. 2 at 7. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

OPENED RECENTLY

BELFAST BLUES
Geraldine Hughes becomes a living history book in her dazzling one-woman show, which shows the audience how simple people scraped by—or didn't—in war-torn Belfast in the seventies and eighties. She animates a couple dozen friends and family members (and her young self) with pathos but without schmaltz. Her eyes, which an American film producer called "Belfast blue" (hence the title), got her a part in a movie as a kid. They are like the too lucid eyes of the child on the cover of the U2 "War" album: the eyes of a witness. (Culture Project, 45 Bleecker St. 212-307-4100.)

COUNSELLOR-AT-LAW
In Elmer Rice's 1931 legal drama, a not altogether scrupulous attorney struggles to avoid disbarment. The Peccadillo Theatre Company's revival last spring was well received and is now in the middle of a six-week run Off Broadway, starring John Rubinstein. Directed by Dan Wackerman. (St. Clement's, 423 W. 46th St. 212-868-4444.)

FIDDLER ON THE ROOF
Harvey Fierstein has taken over the role of Tevye in David Leveaux's elegant production of the classic musical about the troubles of a Russian Jewish peasant family in 1905. Fierstein's voice sounds like a klezmer clarinet, alternating between resonant froggy lows and leering reedy highs—it's memorable, but not quite in keeping with "Tradition." Andrea Martin, as Golde, is appropriately wifely. (Minskoff, 200 W. 45th St. 212-307-4100.)

THE FLID SHOW
New Directions Theatre presents a play by Richard Willett about a British thalidomide baby who grows up to be a cabaret singer. The production stars the British actor Mat Fraser, who himself is a victim of the drug. Directed by Eliza Beckwith. (Medicine Show Theatre, 549 W. 52nd St. 212-352-3101.)

THE GODS ARE POUNDING MY HEAD! (LUMBERJACK MESSIAHS)
Richard Foreman's current production stars Jay Smith as the lumberjack Dutch, T. Ryder Smith as Frenchie, and the eerie sylph Charlotta Mohlin as their surly muse, Maude. On a set dominated by a locomotive engine and a slide that looks like a log chute, the three of them explore the proposition that "when the big heart of the world breaks, then everything breaks." (Note: All shows start promptly; latecomers will not be admitted.) (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-533-4650.)

GOOD VIBRATIONS
Thirty-one songs by Brian Wilson and the Beach Boys form the backdrop for this musical, about a group of East Coast teen-agers who head to California in search of surf and sun. Directed and choreographed by John Carrafa. (Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE HOUSE OF BERNARDA ALBA
The Pearl Theatre Company presents Federico García Lorca's drama about a widow whose mourning ruins the lives of her daughters. Directed by Shepard Sobel. (80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802.)

HURLYBURLY
In David Rabe's 1984 play, four would-be machers in Hollywood vent their substance-fuelled spleen at each other and at the women who skitter into and out of their lives. In the New Group's revival, Ethan Hawke gives an all-out performance as the self-torturing Eddie, and Bobby Cannavale is appropriately frightening as the thuggish Phil. With Parker Posey, Josh Hamilton, Wallace Shawn, Catherine Kellner, and Halley Wegryn Gross as a creepily vacant hitchhiker bimbo who possesses secret reserves of character. Scott Elliott directs. (Theatre Row, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

THE LATE HENRY MOSS
Sam Shepard's semiautobiographical play about a deceased father and his rage-choked sons is by no means his finest, but it's a key to what spurred the youthful playwright's hyper-productive energy in the seventies. Cyndy A. Marion's intimate revival for the White Horse Theatre Company features several powerful performances—including those of Bill Fairbairn as the father, Sylvia Roldan Dohi as his sultry, taunting girlfriend, and James Wetzel as the elder son. But over all, the production fails to convey the desert loneliness that is the play's emotional setting. (Creative Place Theatre, 750 Eighth Ave. 212-868-4444.)

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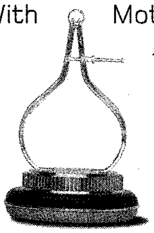

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LITTLE WOMEN
In this glib musical production of the Louisa May Alcott classic about four sisters who come of age during the Civil War, Maureen McGovern (as Marmee, their mother) gives a stirring rendition of the ballad "Days of Plenty," and Sutton Foster shines as Jo, particularly in the made-for-schoolgirls anthem "Astonishing." But the show's under-nuanced, anachronistic book turns Jo into a strident, sitcom-variety showboat and flattens her sisters into caricatures. Book by Allan Knee, lyrics by Mindi Dickstein, and music by Jason Howland. Directed by Susan H. Schulman. (Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 212-239-6200.)

NITA & ZITA
Katie Pearl and Kathy Randels star in Lisa D'Amour's award-winning production about Flora and Piroska Gellert, Hungarian-born sisters who moved to this country in 1922 and became burlesque performers. (HERE, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 212-868-4444. Through Feb. 6.)

ORANGES LIKE THE SUN
When Judylee Vivier dances barefoot onto the glowing set and begins speaking lyrically of her childhood in South Africa during apartheid, as a white girl (and only daughter) who loved her black nurse as much as her own mother, she recalls Pamela Gien's "The Syringa Tree," a one-woman memoir that travelled unshod over similar terrain. But Vivier's narrative is more personal than political. Her subject isn't South Africa's struggle to escape its repressive history but her own struggle to go abroad and become an actress and to make peace with her decision to leave the past behind. (78th Street Theatre Lab, 236 W. 78th St. 212-868-4444. Through Feb. 20.)

PYRETOWN
Carl Forsman directs the Keen Company production of a play by John Belluso about the struggles of a middle-aged single mother and a young man in a wheelchair. (Urban Stages, 259 W. 30th St. 212-868-4444.)

THOM PAIN (BASED ON NOTHING)
James Urbaniak ("American Splendor") stars in a prize-winning new play by Will Eno ("The Flu Season"), about one man and his discontents. Directed by Hal Brooks. (DR2, 103 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200.)

ALSO PLAYING

AVENUE Q
Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST
Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 212-307-4747.

LA CAGE AUX FOLLES
Marquis, Broadway at 46th St. 212-307-4100.

CHICAGO
Ambassador, 215 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.

DAME EDNA: BACK WITH A VENGEANCE!
Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

DEMOCRACY
Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 212-307-4100.

FAT PIG
Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200. (Closes Feb. 5.)

GEM OF THE OCEAN
Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. (Closes Feb. 6.)

HAIRSPRAY
Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100.

HAROLD & MAUDE: THE MUSICAL
Paper Mill Playhouse, Brookside Dr., Millburn, N.J. 973-376-4343.

INNOCENTS
Ohio, 56 Wooster St. 212-868-4444. (Through Feb. 5.)

LONE STAR LOVE
John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.

MAMMA MIA!
Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-563-5544.

MODERN ORTHODOX
Dodger Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.

MOVIN' OUT
Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 212-307-4100.

9 PARTS OF DESIRE
Manhattan Ensemble Theatre, 55 Mercer St. 212-239-6200.

A NUMBER
New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200. (Through Feb. 13.)

THE PRODUCERS
St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

700 SUNDAYS
Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

SLAVA'S SNOWSHOW
Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 212-505-0700.

TWELVE ANGRY MEN
American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300.

WICKED
Gershwin, 222 W. 51st St. 212-307-4100.

Katie Pearl and Kathy Randels, in "Nita & Zita," at HERE.

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET
The season continues. ♦ Feb. 1 at 7:30: "Prodigal Son," "After the Rain," and "Who Cares?" ♦ Feb. 2 at 8: "Mozartiana," "Thou Swell," and "West Side Story Suite." ♦ Feb. 3 at 8 and Feb. 8 at 7:30: "Mozartiana," "Thou Swell," and "The Four Seasons." ♦ Feb. 4 at 8: "Fanfare," "Liturgy," "Orpheus," and "The Four Seasons." ♦ Feb. 5 at 2: "Fanfare," "Concerto for Two Solo Pianos," and "Stars and Stripes." ♦ Feb. 5 at 8 (an all-Balanchine evening): "Agon," "Prodigal Son," and "Stars and Stripes." ♦ Feb. 6 at 3: "Apollo," "Eros Piano," "Concerto for Two Solo Pianos," and "West Side Story Suite." (New York State Theatre, Lincoln Center. 212-870-5570. Through Feb. 27.)

LA LA LA HUMAN STEPS
The Montreal company's international hit "Amelia" (2002) has its New York première. With its bare set, shadowy lighting, and sleek dancers in black suits or sheer black leotards with boy-cut shorts, the piece has the calculated cool of high-end advertising. But Édouard Lock's choreography bursts through its own varnish: rapid, forceful pas de deux, frenetic sequences of arm and hand gestures, and breathtaking vertical drops from point to lunge. Often, a dancer's upper body appears to be in a Berlin night club while her feet remain at the barre. (BAM's Howard Gilman Opera House, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100. Feb. 1 and Feb. 3-5 at 7:30.)

KEELY GARFIELD
The quirky downtown choreographer presents two new pieces in her season at Dance Theatre Workshop. In "Disturbulance," set to Marc Ribot's original guitar score, Garfield and Walter Dundervill dance a psychosexually taut duet in matching red-and-white striped dresses that make them look like flappers-cum-Chrysler Buildings—or like tremulous American flags. The other new piece, "Scent of Mental Love," is a duet about romantic obsession (a "faux pas de deux," Garfield says). It's set to new songs by Rachelle Garniez in multiple styles—country and Western, opera, and cabaret. (219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Feb. 2-5 at 7:30.)

ELISA MONTE DANCE
Monte brings her dramatic choreography to the Joyce in two programs. Program A includes the première of "A Woman's Way" (a tender love letter of a dance, commissioned by a man for his wife); a revival of her 1986 piece "Dreamtime," which features fluttering hands and rapid shifts of direction; and the repertory pieces "Vejle" (1992) and "White Dragon" (1982). The second program, an evening-length loss-and-recovery cycle called "Via Sacra," marries her recent works "Lost Things" and "Light Lies" with a new center section of anguished gestures and slow collapses, "Psyche's Journey." (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Program A: Feb. 3 and Feb. 5 at 8 and Feb. 6 at 7:30. Gala performance on Feb. 1 at 7:30. Program B: Feb. 2 and Feb. 4 at 8 and Feb. 6 at 2.)

"MY PRICE POINT"
In his fourth solo show, the downtown monologuist Mike Albo dances and vamps his way through post-election America, a landscape awash in manufactured fear, mindless consumerism, celebrity gossip, and reality TV. Created with his longtime co-writer Virginia Heffernan and with the choreographer Cary Curran; directed by David Schweizer. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 212-477-5288. Feb. 3-5 at 8 and Feb. 6 at 5. Through Feb. 13.)

CONFIGURATION
The Cape Cod-based troupe continues its noble mission of presenting contemporary ballet choreography that avoids the lapses in taste to which that hybrid genre is prone. The changing ensemble consistently draws dancers from top companies. This season, Donald Williams, Joseph Cipolla, and Christina Johnson—who once danced together in Dance Theatre of Harlem—reunite, bringing solemn grandeur to Royston Maldoon's "Adagietto #5," a Mahler treatment. The evening also includes repertory works by Peter Quanz and Harrison McEldowney and a gently goofy new offering from City Ballet's Edwaard Liang, "Mixed Nuts." (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Feb. 7-8 at 8.)

PHILLIPA KAYE COMPANY
Kaye's sophomore season features two premières. "Surface," set to jazz by Medeski Martin & Wood, is sensual: dancers in skimpy costumes maneuver through a set draped in fifty yards of silky fabric and meet in a tangle of limbs. "Case of You Still," a solo, shows Kaye alone, interpreting various versions of Joni Mitchell's bittersweet song. The program concludes with an update of last year's glow-stick-enhanced exploration of chaos theory: "Ritual for a Non-Repeating Universe (Again)." (Merce Cunningham Studio, 55 Bethune St. 212-545-5322. Feb. 4 at 9 and Feb. 5-6 at 8.)

POLLY MOTLEY
The mathematician Leonardo Fibonacci proved that the seemingly random spirals and whorls of plant growth follow a plan that reflects a numeri-

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VIAGRA is prescribed to treat erectile dysfunction. We know that no medicine is for everyone. If you use nitrate drugs, often used for chest pain (known as angina), don't take VIAGRA. Taking these drugs together could cause your blood pressure to drop to an unsafe level.

The most common side effects of VIAGRA are headache, facial flushing, and upset stomach. Less common are bluish or blurred vision, or being sensitive to light. These may occur for a brief time. Remember to protect yourself and your partner from sexually transmitted diseases.

Talk with your doctor first. Make sure you are healthy enough to have sex. If you have chest pain, nausea, or other discomforts during sex, seek medical help right away. The same is true if you have an erection that lasts more than 4 hours. Call for help at once.

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to consult with your physician.

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PATIENT SUMMARY OF INFORMATION ABOUT **VIAGRA®**

(sildenafil citrate) tablets

This summary contains important information about VIAGRA®. It is not meant to take the place of your doctor's instructions. Read this information carefully before you start taking VIAGRA. Ask your doctor or pharmacist if you do not understand any of this information or if you want to know more about VIAGRA.

This medicine can help many men when it is used as prescribed by their doctors. However, VIAGRA is not for everyone. It is intended for use only by men who have a condition called erectile dysfunction. **VIAGRA must never be used by men who are taking medicines that contain nitrates of any kind, at any time. This includes nitroglycerin. If you take VIAGRA with any nitrate medicine your blood pressure could suddenly drop to an unsafe or life threatening level.**

• What Is VIAGRA?
VIAGRA is a pill used to treat erectile dysfunction (impotence) in men. It can help many men who have erectile dysfunction get and keep an erection when they become sexually excited (stimulated).

You will not get an erection just by taking this medicine. VIAGRA helps a man with erectile dysfunction get an erection only when he is sexually excited.

• How Sex Affects the Body
When a man is sexually excited, the penis rapidly fills with more blood than usual. The penis then expands and hardens. This is called an erection. After the man is done having sex, this extra blood flows out of the penis back into the body. The erection goes away. If an erection lasts for a long time (more than 6 hours), it can permanently damage your penis. You should call a doctor immediately if you ever have a prolonged erection that lasts more than 4 hours.

Some conditions and medicines interfere with this natural erection process. The penis cannot fill with enough blood. The man cannot have an erection. This is called erectile dysfunction if it becomes a frequent problem.

During sex, your heart works harder. Therefore sexual activity may not be advisable for people who have heart problems. Before you start any treatment for erectile dysfunction, ask your doctor if your heart is healthy enough to handle the extra strain of having sex. If you have chest pains, dizziness or nausea during sex, stop having sex and immediately tell your doctor you have had this problem.

• How VIAGRA Works
VIAGRA enables many men with erectile dysfunction to respond to sexual stimulation. When a man is sexually excited, VIAGRA helps the penis fill with enough blood to cause an erection. After sex is over, the erection goes away.

• VIAGRA Is Not for Everyone
As noted above (*How Sex Affects the Body*), ask your doctor if your heart is healthy enough for sexual activity.

If you take any medicines that contain nitrates – either regularly or as needed – you should never take VIAGRA. If you take VIAGRA with any nitrate medicine or recreational drug containing nitrates, your blood pressure could suddenly drop to an unsafe level. You could get dizzy, faint, or even have a heart attack or stroke. Nitrates are found in many prescription medicines that are used to treat angina (chest pain due to heart disease) such as:

- nitroglycerin (sprays, ointments, skin patches or pastes, and tablets that are swallowed or dissolved in the mouth)
- isosorbide mononitrate and isosorbide dinitrate (tablets that are swallowed, chewed, or dissolved in the mouth)

Nitrates are also found in recreational drugs such as amyl nitrate or nitrite ("poppers"). If you are not sure if any of your medicines contain nitrates, or if you do not understand what nitrates are, ask your doctor or pharmacist.

VIAGRA is only for patients with erectile dysfunction. VIAGRA is not for newborns, children, or women. Do not let anyone else take your VIAGRA. VIAGRA must be used only under a doctor's supervision.

• What VIAGRA Does Not Do

- VIAGRA does not cure erectile dysfunction. It is a treatment for erectile dysfunction.
- VIAGRA does not protect you or your partner from getting sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV — the virus that causes AIDS.
- VIAGRA is not a hormone or an aphrodisiac.

• What To Tell Your Doctor Before You Begin VIAGRA
Only your doctor can decide if VIAGRA is right for you. VIAGRA can cause mild, temporary lowering of your blood pressure. You will need to have a thorough medical exam to diagnose your erectile dysfunction and to find out if you can safely take VIAGRA alone or with your other medicines. Your doctor should determine if your heart is healthy enough to handle the extra strain of having sex.

Be sure to tell your doctor if you:

- have ever had any heart problems (e.g., angina, chest pain, heart failure, irregular heart beats, heart attack or narrowing of the aortic valve)
- have ever had a stroke
- have low or high blood pressure
- have a rare inherited eye disease called retinitis pigmentosa
- have ever had any kidney problems
- have ever had any liver problems
- have ever had any blood problems, including sickle cell anemia or leukemia
- are allergic to sildenafil or any of the other ingredients of VIAGRA tablets
- have a deformed penis, Peyronie's disease, or ever had an erection that lasted more than 4 hours
- have stomach ulcers or any types of bleeding problems
- are taking any other medicines

• VIAGRA and Other Medicines
Some medicines can change the way VIAGRA works. Tell your doctor about **any medicines** you are taking. Do not start or stop taking any medicines before checking with your doctor or pharmacist. This includes prescription and nonprescription medicines or remedies:

- Remember, VIAGRA should never be used with medicines that contain nitrates (see *VIAGRA Is Not for Everyone*).
- If you are taking alpha-blocker therapy for the treatment of high blood pressure or prostate problems, you should not take a dose of greater than 25 mg of VIAGRA at the same time (within 4 hours) as you take your dose of alpha-blocker.
- If you are taking a protease inhibitor, your dose may be adjusted (please see *Finding the Right Dose for You*).
- VIAGRA should not be used with any other medical treatments that cause erections. These treatments include pills, medicines that are injected or inserted into the penis, implants or vacuum pumps.

• Finding the Right Dose for You
VIAGRA comes in different doses (25 mg, 50 mg and 100 mg). If you do not get the results you expect, talk with your doctor. You and your doctor can determine the dose that works best for you.

- Do not take more VIAGRA than your doctor prescribes.
- If you think you need a larger dose of VIAGRA, check with your doctor.
- VIAGRA should not be taken more than once a day.

If you are older than age 65, or have serious liver or kidney problems, your doctor may start you at the lowest dose (25 mg) of VIAGRA. If you are taking protease inhibitors, such as for the treatment of HIV, your doctor may recommend a 25 mg dose and may limit you to a maximum single dose of 25 mg of VIAGRA in a 48 hour period. If you are taking alpha-blocker therapy, you should not take a dose of greater than 25 mg of VIAGRA at the same time (within 4 hours) as your dose of alpha-blocker.

• How To Take VIAGRA
Take VIAGRA about one hour before you plan to have sex. Beginning in about 30 minutes and for up to 4 hours, VIAGRA can help you get an erection if you are sexually excited. If you take VIAGRA after a high-fat meal (such as a cheeseburger and french fries), the medicine may take a little longer to start working. VIAGRA can help you get an erection when you are sexually excited. You will not get an erection just by taking the pill.

• Possible Side Effects
Like all medicines, VIAGRA can cause some side effects. These effects are usually mild to moderate and usually don't last longer than a few hours. Some of these side effects are more likely to occur with higher doses. The most common side effects of VIAGRA are headache, flushing of the face, and upset stomach. Less common side effects that may occur are temporary changes in color vision (such as trouble telling the difference between blue and green objects or having a blue color tinge to them), eyes being more sensitive to light, or blurred vision.

In rare instances, men have reported an erection that lasts many hours. You should call a doctor immediately if you ever have an erection that lasts more than 4 hours. If not treated right away, permanent damage to your penis could occur (see *How Sex Affects the Body*).

Heart attack, stroke, irregular heart beats, and death have been reported rarely in men taking VIAGRA. Most, but not all, of these men had heart problems before taking this medicine. It is not possible to determine whether these events were directly related to VIAGRA.

VIAGRA may cause other side effects besides those listed on this sheet. If you want more information or develop any side effects or symptoms you are concerned about, call your doctor.

• Accidental Overdose
In case of accidental overdose, call your doctor right away.

• Storing VIAGRA
Keep VIAGRA out of the reach of children. Keep VIAGRA in its original container. Store at 25°C (77°F); excursions permitted to 15-30°C (59-86°F) [see USP Controlled Room Temperature].

• For More Information on VIAGRA
VIAGRA is a prescription medicine used to treat erectile dysfunction. Only your doctor can decide if it is right for you. This sheet is only a summary. If you have any questions or want more information about VIAGRA, talk with your doctor or pharmacist, visit www.viagra.com, or call 1-888-4VIAGRA.

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September 2002

cal sequence in which each successive number is equal to the sum of the two numbers that precede it. In her intriguing new solo, "Dancing the Numbers," for "City/Dans" at Danspace Project, Motley presents a linked series of short dances that increase in time incrementally, mimicking the Fibonacci pattern. To give the work its onstage shape, she progresses outward along a spiral path. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-674-8194. Feb. 3-6 at 8:30.)

"DANCEMOPOLITAN"
The popular downtown cabaret-style dance series at Joe's Pub kicks off its 2005 season, with Doug Elkins as host. A dozen choreographers fill the lineup, including Julian Barnett (with new work), Mary Cochran (reprising her popular "Patriot Act Up"), and John Heginbotham ("Cell Block Tango"). For a complete schedule, visit www.dancenow.nyc. (425 Lafayette St. 212-539-8770. Feb. 4-5 at 9:30.)

"AMAZULU DANCE AS A WEAPON: THE HIP-HOP CIRCUS—PART I"
Akim Funk Buddha presents his "personal cosmic story" of hip-hop in a percussive performance that blends beat boxing, martial arts, B-boying, and more. (La Mama, 74A E. 4th St. 212-475-7710. Feb. 3-5 at 10 and Feb. 6 at 5:30. Through Feb. 20.)

LAURA PAWEL DANCE COMPANY
The concert includes the hopeful solo "Phoenix," set to a score by Eleanor Hovda, the ensemble piece "Pedestrian Zone," and a new quartet, "Tangled Yarn," set to an original score by the Barebones duo (Gene Caprioglio and Bob La Sardo), Phil Stone, and Hovda, who perform live. (Dance Forum, 20 E. 17th St. 212-633-7202. Feb. 4-5 at 8 and Feb. 6 at 5.)

"DEVIL'S PLAYGROUND"
The Heather Harrington Dance Company explores the capricious workings of the stock market and the emotions that motivate trades in a performance that mingles props, performance, and discussion. Part of the monthly series "Sundays @ Three," at the 92nd Street Y. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Feb. 6 at 3.)

NIGHT LIFE
CONCERTS

KEANE
Hearkening back to the likes of Travis, Coldplay, and early U2, this up-and-coming British trio specializes in passionate pop songs. By eschewing guitars in favor of plangent pianos and the heartfelt vocals of its lead singer, Tom Chaplin, Keane has become the current name to drop. With the **Zutons** (the hip U.K. export that had the younger set dancing shoeless and the older folks covering their ears at a recent MOMA opening party) and the **Redwalls** (who hail from Chicago but who can often sound like they're from England circa 1966). (Hammerstein Ballroom, Manhattan Center, 311 W. 34th St. 212-307-7171. Feb. 2 at 7:30.)

"AMERICAN SONGBOOK"
Jazz at Lincoln Center's new Columbus Circle home benefits more than just that organization's main orchestra. This Lincoln Center series, for example, has grown, now that it has moved into the expansive Rose Theatre and the supper-club-like Allen Room. The current season features expected cabaret acts like Elaine Stritch, Patti LuPone, and Nellie McKay, as well as such folk and country artists as Rosanne Cash, Dar Williams, and Laura Cantrell. Feb. 2 at 8:30: A staged reading of Duncan Sheik and Steven Sater's musical "Spring Awakening," which is based on Frank Wedekind's 1891 play, about the loss of innocence. Feb. 3 at 8:30: The bespectacled waif **Lisa Loeb.** Feb. 4 at 7:30 and 9:30: The vocalist **Darius De Haas** romps through the Stevie Wonder songbook. (Allen Room, Broadway at 60th St. 212-721-6500.)

QUEENSRYCHE
For the first time in fifteen years, the Seattle progressive-metal quintet revisits "Operation: Mindcrime," its Orwellian Reagan-era concept album. (Beacon Theatre, Broadway at 74th St. 212-307-7171. Feb. 3 at 8.)

BOB BROZMAN
The slide-guitar master and globe-trotting ethnomusicologist sets down in Park Slope. (The Good Coffeehouse Music Parlor, Brooklyn Society for Ethical Culture, 53 Prospect Park W., at 2nd St. 718-768-2972. Feb. 4 at 8.)

WORLD MUSIC INSTITUTE
Feb. 4 at 10: The **Soweto Gospel Choir** mixes traditional African gospel music with songs and arrangements by the likes of Jimmy Cliff and Otis Redding. The twenty-six choristers sing in five of South Africa's official languages and are accompanied by tribal dancers and a four-piece band. This is their first time in New York City. (Zankel Hall, Carnegie Hall.) ♦ Johnny Cunningham, the great Scottish fiddler who died in December of 2003, was a beloved figure in Celtic-music circles, as well known for his blistering reels as he was for his storytelling and boundless sense of humor. Many of the musicians who worked with him—including his accordion-playing brother **Phil Cunningham** (who first stood beside him in Silly Wizard nearly thirty years ago), the Sligo-style fiddler **Kevin Burke,** Solas's **Seamus Eagan,** and the singer **Susan McKeown**—pay their respects on Feb. 5 at 8 in what promises to be an entertaining, life-affirming evening. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St.) (For more information about both shows, call 212-545-7536.)

CREOLE COWBOYS
A Mardi Gras ball with a new band from Louisiana that includes the accordionist Jeffrey Broussard, of Zydeco Force, and the fiddler and guitarist D'Jalma Garnier, of File. (Hungarian House, 213 E. 82nd St. For more information, call 212-685-7597. Feb. 6 at 5.)

CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—Feb. 4: The legendary party leader **Buckwheat Zydeco** splits the bill with the leggy swamp rocker **Marcia Ball.** Feb. 8: The **Dirty Dozen Brass Band** are New Orleans revisionists who put the stomp into everything they play, from Jelly Roll Morton to Michael Jackson.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Feb. 3-4: The Minnesota indie trio **Low** practices a whisper-quiet blend of subtle rock. Feb. 7-8: **Kings of Convenience,** Norway's answer to Simon and Garfunkel, are a pair of tender twenty-something singers from Bergen who favor close-knit harmonizing and soft guitar strumming. Their latest album, "Riot on an Empty Street," finds them in the company of the vocalist Leslie Feist and indulging in bossa-nova rhythms.

FEZ
380 Lafayette St. (212-533-7000)—Feb. 4-5: The versatile local tribute ensemble the **Loser's Lounge** hoist their glasses to the British rock gods Queen and do their best to re-create the late Freddy Mercury's bombastic, virtually inimitable aplomb. The **Charles Mingus Orchestra** still packs them in every Thursday. Dining.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—Feb. 2: **Chuck Prophet** first staked his claim to the fringes of the charts twenty years ago as a member of the neo-Americana group Green on Red. Since then the undersung guitarist with the scruffy voice has turned out several albums of boundaryless roots rock. His latest is called "Age of Miracles." Feb. 3: **Roomful of Blues,** one of Rhode Island's most durable exports, has seen numerous personnel changes in its thirty-seven-year history, but its commitment to hard-hitting, horn-driven testimonials has never wavered.

MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (212-260-4700)—Feb. 1: **L'altra** is Lindsay Anderson and Joseph Costa, two ex-lovers from Chicago who tender music that sounds welcoming and warm (their songs are dreamy, slow, and infused with electronic touches) but is in fact isolating and lonely (their lyrics are cynical and dark). The two are here to celebrate the release of their third album, "Different Days." Feb. 4 and Feb. 7: Recent events may have the Bay Area group **Rogue Wave** thinking about changing its name. It shouldn't, however, change its shimmering and mellow sixties-style indie pop. With the homespun modern-rock sound of Brooklyn's **Dirty on Purpose.** Feb. 5: The Vancouver singer **Jolie Holland,** one of the founders of the Be Good Tanyas, mixes dark roots music with complex jazz sophistication.

SATALLA
37 W. 26th St. (212-576-1155)—Feb. 5: The singer-songwriter **Lhasa** (see This Week).

The indie-rock band Rogue Wave plays two shows at the Mercury Lounge this week.

SAM WEBER

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THIS WEEK'S
WEB EXCLUSIVES:

Sasha Frere-Jones talks with Bright Eyes' Conor Oberst about music and politics.

A slide show of photographs from the U.S. military's relief effort in Indonesia, by Benjamin Lowy.

An archive of hundreds of past Web exclusives, including Q. & A.s, cover galleries, slide shows, Web sightings, and more.

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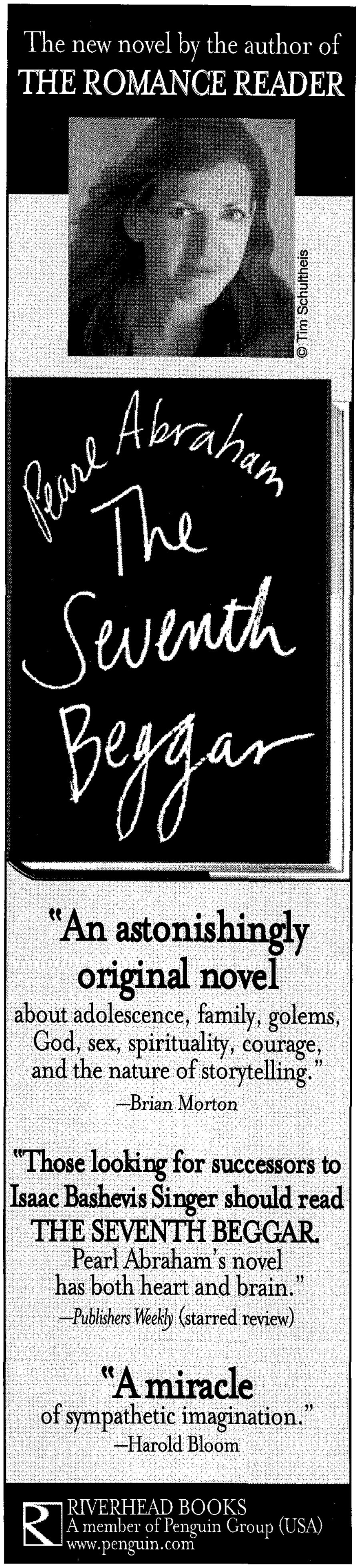

The new novel by the author of
THE ROMANCE READER

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Pearl Abraham
The Seventh Beggar

"An astonishingly original novel
about adolescence, family, golems, God, sex, spirituality, courage, and the nature of storytelling."
—Brian Morton

"Those looking for successors to Isaac Bashevis Singer should read THE SEVENTH BEGGAR. Pearl Abraham's novel has both heart and brain."
—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

"A miracle
of sympathetic imagination."
—Harold Bloom

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SIN-É
150 Attorney St. (212-388-0077)—Feb. 8: **Dälek**, an avant hip-hop trio from New Jersey, revels in heavy beats and grinding industrial sounds. They record on Ipecac, the label run by the inexhaustible noise rocker Mike Patton, and their new album, "Absence," has been likened, quite fairly, it turns out, to a cross between Public Enemy and Einstürzende Neubauten.

S.O.B.'S
204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (212-243-4940)—Feb. 2: The Malian guitarist and singer **Habib Koité** is made for Mayor Bloomberg's New York—his first hit was an antismoking song called "Cigarette Abana." Born into a griot family in Mali and educated at the National Institute of Arts, in Bamako, Koité knows first hand how to link the traditions of the past with contemporary blues and pop.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Through Feb. 6: **Chick Corea's** 1982 album "Touchstone," which featured the flamenco guitarist Paco de Lucia, must be near and dear to the acclaimed pianist-composer-bandleader. Corea is currently employing members of de Lucia's ensemble for further explorations of his own Spanish heritage.

CARLYLE HOTEL
Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound murals, and, through Feb. 26, **Ute Lemper.** Exuding cultural sophistication, vocal daring, and unabashed sensuality, Lemper personifies smart cabaret. Her new show, "Blood and Feathers," draws on Brecht and other Continental favorites, along with Broadway titans like Stephen Sondheim and her own compositions, except on Thursday nights, when she takes "A Walk on the Weill Side."

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Through Feb. 6: The percussionist **Cyro Baptista** has worked with everyone from Paul Simon to John Zorn. On his own he follows an eclectic muse that helps him balance compositional sophistication with bedrock propulsion.

FEINSTEIN'S AT THE REGENCY
540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (212-339-4095)—Through Feb. 15: The Broadway luminary **Brian Stokes Mitchell** makes his night-club début with a seasonally appropriate feel-good program of love songs. The macho-tinged tenderness so integral to his star turns in "Man of La Mancha" and "Kiss Me Kate" should help him make short work of any excessive sweetness.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Feb. 2-3: **Anita O'Day** is just about the last lady standing from the heyday of the swing era. At her age she can't be expected to be the live wire she was with the bands of Gene Krupa and Stan Kenton and throughout her subsequent solo career, but there's still plenty of sass and swing left to kindle memories. Feb. 4-6: **Mark Murphy**, a paragon of the art of vocal improvisation since the fifties, is still more than willing to transform both standards and obscurities into his personal property. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

LE JAZZ AU BAR
41 E. 58th St. (212-308-9455)—Feb. 2-27: **Ruth Brown** is fondly remembered as one of the queens of postwar R. & B., thanks to her hits "This Little Girl's Gone Rockin' " and "Lucky Lips," but she's always been firmly rooted in jazz (she was reportedly signed to Atlantic records on the recommendation of Duke Ellington). Since her late-eighties comeback, she's reinvented herself as a mature song stylist who can shape a ballad with heart and plenty of soul.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Through Feb. 6: **Dave Douglas** is a restless musician who, to no one's surprise, has put together a new band. With Nomad, the questing trumpeter employs cello, tuba, reeds, and drums to reconfigure world-music-inspired melodies. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-879-5500)—**"Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640): The Drawings."** A hundred and fifteen of the Flemish master's drawings. Through April 3. ♦ Duccio's "Madonna and Child," circa 1300, a triumphant recent acquisition for the Met. Through March 13. ♦ **"Wild: Fashion Untamed."** Clothes and accessories derived from and inspired by animals. Through March 13. ♦ **"The Kano School: Orthodoxy and Iconoclasm."** Through June 5. ♦ The sylphs, stylized flowers, and sumptuous geometries of **"Art Deco Paris"** are familiar, but what's interesting about this show—a pendant to the now closed gathering of works by the master designer Jacques-Émile Ruhlmann—is the fetishistic love of lavish materials and their juxtapositions. There's a side table in ebony, ivory, and green-dyed sharkskin; a tea-and-coffee service in silver trimmed with lapis lazuli; a dressing table made of bronze and basalt. Also included are artifacts from the celebrated interior-decorating firm of Süe et Mare, which employed starving artists like

TABLES FOR TWO

CASA MONO
52 Irving Pl. (212-253-2773)—Andy Nusser, the executive chef and co-owner (with Mario Batali, Joe Bastianich, and Nancy Selzer) of this tiny tapas-inspired restaurant, has a fascination with arcane offal. Perhaps it's the legacy of Babbo, where Nusser spent five years and where tripe and sweetbreads are so common that they are scarcely worth mentioning. But even the most jaded thrill-seeker will be impressed by the cockscombs at Casa Mono. Their texture—halfway between osso buco and jello—might put off some diners, but the persuasive preparation, a rich reduction of red wine and *cepas* (Spanish porcini), transcends mere novelty. (The combs themselves are recognizable, with spiky crenellations that make one imagine Foghorn Leghorn wildly clutching his scalp.) There are plenty of unintimidating Spanish dishes, too, such as *bacalao* croquettes (here served with orange-tinged aioli) and *pan con tomate*. Among a pleasing selection of dishes designated "a la plancha" (a kind of Spanish griddle), the octopus—two baby specimens on a bier of fennel and grapefruit—is a standout.

Nusser's commitment to his adoptive cuisine extends to an all-Spanish wine list of some two hundred bottles, including the sonorously named Txomín Etxaniz Txakoli, a light Basque white. Luckily, the servers offer excellent guidance through this unfamiliar territory. Their patience is all the more impressive given that the room is crammed full with elbow-to-elbow seating. (The young, affluent crowd also presses into Casa Mono's engagingly chaotic offshoot around the corner, Bar Jamón, which shares the wine list.) On a recent evening, when the coat of a departing guest swept a dish of olives from a nearby table, waiters swooped upon the mess with impressive speed. For late diners, there's a happy consolation for the difficulties of booking; as the place empties and the kitchen staff start to shut down their grills, a pleasant languor prevails—it's almost Spanish. (Open daily for lunch and dinner. Entrées $3-$15.)

—*Leo Carey*

Raoul Dufy, Marie Laurencin, and Fernand Léger. Through Feb. 27. ♦ **"All That Glitters Is Not Gold: The Art, Form, and Function of Gilt Bronze in the French Interior."** Through Feb. 20. ♦ **"Romare Bearden at the Met."** Through April 6. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—The museum has reopened in its renovated and enlarged home and is presenting a series of exhibits related to its metamorphosis. ♦ **"Yoshio Taniguchi: Nine Museums"** celebrates the architect and his previous art-housing projects, of which the new Modern is the first outside of Japan. Through Jan. 31. ♦ **"Projects 82: Mark Dion—Rescue Archaeology."** Dion excavated traces of former Rockefeller town houses and the old Dorset Hotel from beneath the sculpture garden for this site-specific project. Through March 14. ♦ **"Michael Wesely: Open Shutter at the Museum of Modern Art."** The German photographer turned his long exposure method (he has left the shutter open for as long as three years) on MOMA while it was under construction. Through mid-2005. ♦ **"Contemporary Voices: Works from the UBS Art Collection."** Opens Feb. 4. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Fridays, 10:30 to 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"The Aztec Empire"** lines the Guggenheim's spiral with more than four hundred artifacts, from carvings depicting harvest work to implements for human sacrifice. Through Feb. 13. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3676)—**"Cy Twombly: Fifty Years of Works on Paper."** Through May 8. ♦ **"Ellen Gallagher: DeLuxe."** A series of embellished images based on advertisements from the backs of mid-century African-American magazines. Through May 15. ♦ **"James Lee Byars: The Perfect Silence."** Drawings, installations, and sculpture. Through March 6. ♦ **"Political Nature,"** a modest gathering of prints and drawings by Walton Ford, Trenton Doyle Hancock, Frank Moore, and Stephanie Syjuco. Through March 27. ♦ **"Bill Viola: Five Angels for the Millennium."** A large-scale video installation made in 2001. Through March 6. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

DAHESH MUSEUM OF ART

580 Madison Ave., at 57th St. (212-759-0606)—**"First Seen: Photographs of the World's Peoples, 1840-1880."** Opens Feb. 1 (see This Week). (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NEUE GALERIE

1048 Fifth Ave., at 86th St. (212-628-6200)—**"Comic Grotesque: Wit and Mockery in German Art, 1870-1940,"** a succinct, scholarly show, is a crash course in names both big—Böcklin, Kubin, Klinger, Nolde, Grosz, Feininger, Höch, Heartfield—and little (the performer and filmmaker Karl Valentin is a real find) who infused Germanic avant-gardism with sometimes hilarious, always obstreperous ill temper. Through Feb. 14. (Open Fridays, 11 to 9, and Saturdays through Mondays, 11 to 6.)

NEW MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

Temporarily located in the Chelsea Museum, 556 W. 22nd St. (212-219-1222)—**"East Village USA."** Through March 19. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, noon to 6, and Thursday evenings until 8.)

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

170 Central Park W., at 77th St. (212-873-3400)—**"Alexander Hamilton: The Man Who Made Modern America"** is a surprisingly flashy exhibition on the life and legacy of the Founding Father. Through Feb. 28. ♦ The centerpiece of **"Arriving in Style: Treasures of Eighteenth-Century New York"** is a fancy horse-drawn carriage used by the Beekman family of New York starting in 1771; it is one of only three such carriages to survive unaltered into modern times. Through Feb. 20. ♦ Three hundred years' worth of New York cityscapes are on view in **"Impressions of New York: Prints from the New-York Historical Society,"** allowing viewers to observe in flip-book fashion the evolution of streets, parks, and waterways. Through March 20. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.

DIANA THATER

Of Thater's concurrent shows at the Zwirner galleries, the smaller one uptown is stronger than the retrospective in Chelsea. "White Is the Color" is an installation consisting of a single white fluorescent tube on the floor—reminiscent of Dan Flavin's sculptures—and a video projection on the upper wall of what looks like benign, fluffy clouds but is actually billows of smoke from forest fires. The best work, though, is the nocturnal display in the windows. Projections of the same smoke clouds are projected onto the windows from inside the gallery, suggesting an interior inhabited by phosphorescent ghosts. Through Feb. 5. (Zwirner & Wirth, 32 E. 69th St. 212-517-8677.)

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

DONALD BAECHLER

A group of new bronze sculptures in which motifs—a hand, a foot, pots of flowers, a pine tree—are distilled to a childlike purity of form. A series of heads are built around sloppy orbs, with the features seemingly sculpted separately and pressed on; the trees and flowers are just barely three-dimensional. Baechler, who is primarily known as a painter, claims to be making "mute," non-narrative objects, but his simplified forms allow even the smallest grace notes—the bowing neck of a flower's stem, the blunted tips of fingers—to speak volumes. Through Feb. 12. (Cheim & Read, 547 W. 25th St. 212-242-7727.)

WALTER MARTIN AND PALOMA MUÑOZ

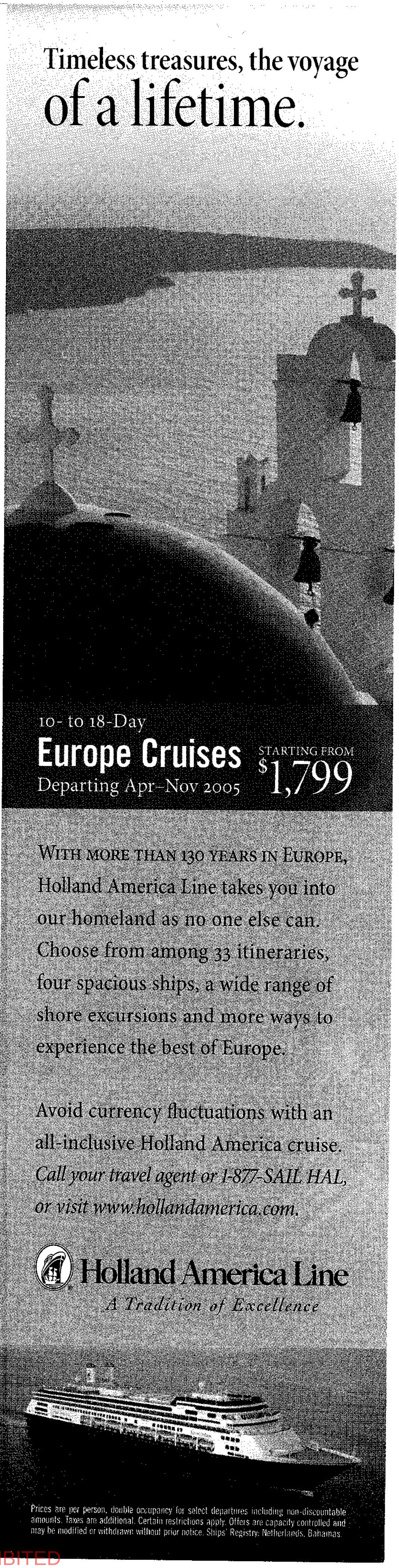
Cold as it has been lately, things could be worse. Witness the desolate little worlds assembled in snow globes and photographed by these two collaborators. A pair of overalled rustics drown children instead of kittens in a well; couples in black robes and hoods waltz in a clearing; a procession of villagers bear torches and heads on stakes. The most disturbing images are of tiny solitary figures setting out through the woods with briefcases or bags of groceries, woefully ill-equipped for the icy chill ahead. Through Feb. 5. (P.P.O.W., 555 W. 25th St. 212-647-1044.)

MEREDITH MONK

A diminutive but charming show of "Vocal Gestures," etchings that look like raindrop trajectories, mountain peaks, or EKG recordings spread out along the five-line musical staff. The etchings tie in with Monk's practice as a performer and composer, nodding to the mid-century liberation of music from systems of Western notation—à la John Cage and the acolytes of Dadaist accident and chance. A video titled "16 Millimeter Earrings" (1966) stars a youthful Monk peering through a magnifying glass and disassembling the wig she's wearing, and the white-painted "Singing Suitcase" emits the sound of the artist's ethereal voice when you open it. Through Feb. 5. (Frederieke Taylor, 535 W. 22nd St. 646-230-0992.)

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG

Twelve large panels of collaged American pictures—junked cars, tumbledown houses, city streets and country fields—arranged like enormous magazine clippings on white panels via Rauschenberg's signature medium of pigment transfer. The colors are muted and saturated, the layout skillful, the images nostalgic. But, for works ostensibly about regional specificity and soul, these grandly scaled pieces, made between 2002 and 2004, feel notably generic and soulless. It's like a blockbuster movie version of Rauschenberg—all im-



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pressive visuals, not so much content. Through Feb. 5. (Pace Wildenstein, 534 W. 25th St. 212-929-7000.)

SAM REVELES
Up close, Reveles's canvases look as gestural as a child's scrawls on a chalkboard, suggesting denser versions of Cy Twombly's epic paintings. Step back, though, and the webbed networks of lines coalesce into monochrome compositions in bright red, blue, and purple. The titles—"Seneca," "Isle of Dogs," "Indian Roman"—don't give much away, though the deep-hued canvases conjure the desert of El Paso where the artist lives and works. Look around the edges and you can see the original colors on which his forest of marks have been laid down. Through Feb. 5. (CRG, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-229-2766.)

"Photo de Groupe," from 1949, by Robert Doisneau, at Bruce Silverstein.

NANCY RUBINS
Airplane parts salvaged from junkyards are bound together and fixed to steel posts with wire, creating what look like trees in the artist's "Small Forest." John Chamberlain's crushed-car sculptures come to mind, but Rubins's are more open and generous. Pieces of airplane wings, propellers, and engine casings unfold gracefully in the space over viewers' heads, divorced from function but remarried to the notion of flight. Both sculptures were designed in her California studio to fit the gallery, and the complex, jigsaw-puzzle compositions just fit inside, almost grazing the ceiling like clouds. The annex around the corner houses photo-collages, which often serve as studies. Through Feb. 12. (Kasmin, 293 Tenth Ave. 212-563-4474.)

Short List

CECILY BROWN
Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 212-741-1111.
Through Feb. 26.

DIANA THATER
Zwirner, 525 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070.
Through Feb. 5.

GALLERIES–BROOKLYN

TONY FITZPATRICK
A sprawling archive of matchbook covers, ticket stubs, advertisements, labels, playing cards, and other such detritus supplies the raw material for Fitzpatrick's collages. Brightly colored and densely patterned, each small panel presents a central figure—a dancing bulldog, a giant moth, a cross—surrounded by satellite faces, bits of language, and musical notes. The works have titles like "Chicago Cardinal" and "Jesus of Chicago"; all are valentines to the artist's native city, where the often truant Fitzpatrick used to go on work rounds with his father, a burial-vault salesman. Through Feb. 7. (Pierogi, 177 N. 9th St. 718-599-2144.)

THOMAS LENDVAI
An installation in which a series of heavy rawwood beams slant through the gallery from wall to wall, as though the roof of a barn or shed had sliced through the little white cube. Spaced at the construction-standard width of sixteen inches, the joists also tilt progressively toward the floor at the back of the room, so that visitors must duck down, or thread head and shoulders through the openings as if popping up through an unfinished floor. These very simple forms create a surprisingly complex sculptural and architectural effect. Through Feb. 7. (Plus Ultra, 235 S. 1st St. 718-387-3844.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

THOMAS ALLEN
Pop-up art ascends to sublime heights in these twenty-by-twenty-four-inch chromogenic prints of constructions made from old books. Why not view the books themselves? Because here the artist controls the lighting, perspective, and focus to create multidimensional scenes rich in detail. In "Swell," a ship with numbered sails rides the wave of the unabridged dictionary it was clipped from. In "Thirst," a femme fatale holds a glass out from her cover, to be filled by a rogue from a neighboring volume. Through Feb. 5. (Foley, 547 W. 27th St. 212-244-9081.)

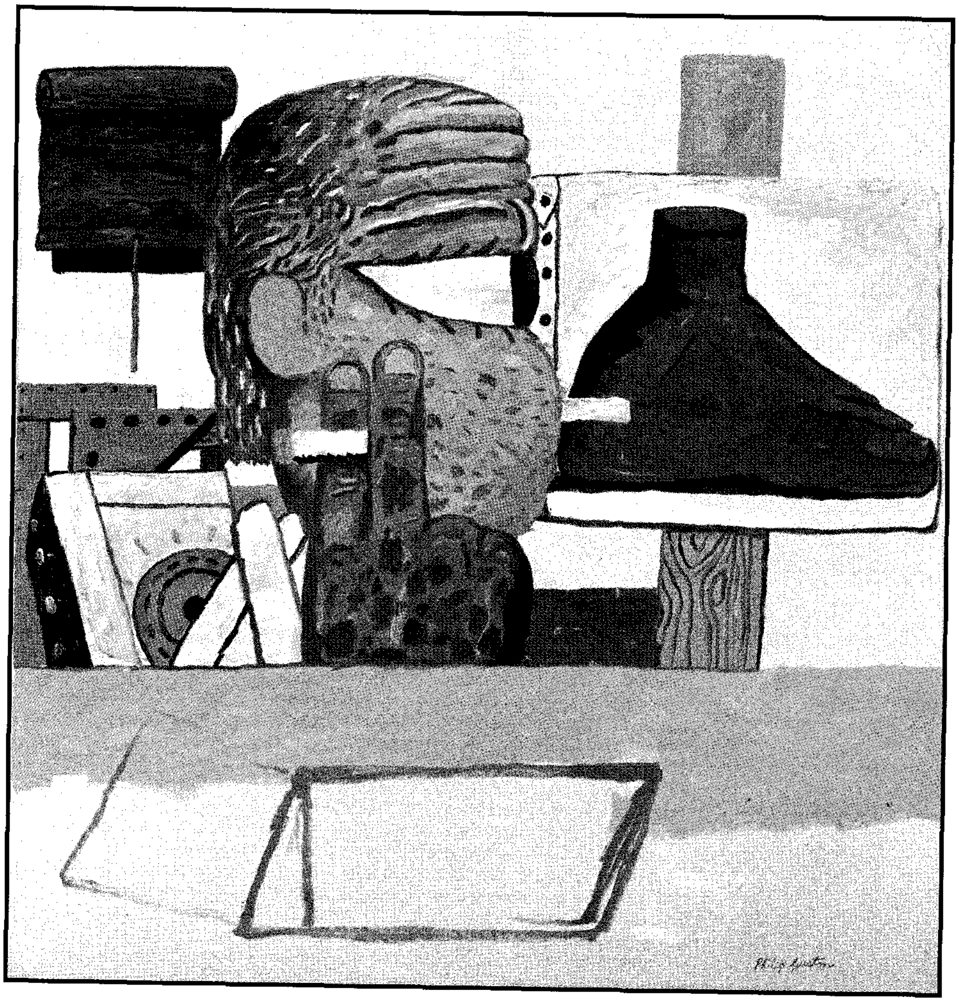
STEPHEN HUGHES
A selection of exquisite color landscapes, most of them in the margins of European towns and cities or by the sea, identified only by the sketchiest of place names. If Andreas Gursky, with whom Hughes shares a kindred formalism, is the glittering existentialist of the European aesthetic, then Hughes is the demure poet, concerning himself less with the thrilling, ghastly spectacle of modern life than with the private moments of strange beauty contained within it. These are pictures about dislocation but not really about alienation. In "Far Rockaway, USA," the bleakness of an urban coastal landscape in winter is perfectly rendered—inscrutable high-rises in the background, a blank tract house in the foreground. There are no signs of life except for a few gulls walking the shoreline—and, in the water, a miraculous swan. Through March 5. (Mann, 210 Eleventh Ave. 212-989-7600.)

PETER HUJAR
Downtown New York at night in the seventies and early eighties, before SoHo and the meatpacking district were turned into shopping malls, was anarchic, filthy, and fun. In these glistening photographs of unpopulated streets and lighted downtown office buildings; of a smashed car and a defunct diner; of angelic, muscled pretty boys and flocks of giddy queens on Halloween, Hujar captures the high jinks, the innocence, and also the wreckage of this vivid period, when people came to the city to reinvent themselves. The images recall Abbott, Arbus, and Evans but have their own distinct period feel. In "Blanket 1985," a piece of old carpet, folded inside out, is heaped on the sidewalk, alongside a string of battered Guston-like trash cans, suggesting the era's cold, bitter comfort; two years later, Hujar, along with so many of his subjects, was dead, of AIDS. Through March 5. (Marks, 523 W. 24th St. 212-243-0200.)

TRISH MORRISSEY
A set of color prints that depict the thirty-seven-year-old Irish photographer and her sister—posed as themselves as children, their parents, and various aunts and friends. Morrissey uses dated clothes like tight running shorts and multicolored nylon coats to create her reimagined family moments, along with formal gimmickry—in "August 8, 1982," a pose at the seaside is marred by two blurry fingers over the lens. Through Feb. 26. (Milo, 552 W. 24th St. 212-414-0370.)

STUART O'SULLIVAN
These large color prints by a young South African, now living in New York, capture the world of affluent white Europeans who live in post-apartheid South Africa. There are interiors with the quality of still-lifes ("Roses and Lemons" features a prized collection of books devoted to the region; vintage family photographs hang on the wall next to a security device) and portraits of O'Sullivan's relatives and friends (both black and white), at home and in the countryside. An image of spiky, orange flowering plants has a delicate tracery of concertina wire in the background. Through Feb. 26. (Cooney, 511 W. 25th St. 212-255-8158.)

MALICK SIDIBÉ
Stripes, checks, zigzags, and block prints drape the backs of queenly African women in a recent series of large black-and-white prints in colorful painted-glass frames. This series barely prepares you for the barrage of vintage prints and other new work (1960-2004), similarly framed and of all different sizes, arranged in five tremendous circles on the



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gallery walls: nearly four hundred black-and-white photographs, including dignified portraits taken in the studio that Sidibé opened in Bamako, Mali, in 1962, and documentary shots of family and social life in postcolonial French West Africa. The show constitutes a retrospective of work by Sidibé, who won the Hasselblad Award in 2003. Through Feb. 5. (Shainman, 513 W. 20th St. 212-645-1701.)

Short List

RICHARD AVEDON
Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. 212-627-6000. Through Feb. 18.

ROBERT DOISNEAU
Bruce Silverstein, 535 W. 24th St. 212-627-3930. Through Feb. 12.

LALLA ESSAYDI
Laurence Miller, 20 W. 57th St. 212-397-3930. Through Feb. 26.

SYLVIA PLACHY
Hunter/Fox, 35 E. 67th St. 212-288-3535. Through Feb. 26.

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

CHRISTIE'S
Feb. 1-2 at 10 A.M. and 2: The House Sale features the usual array of extravagant art works and home furnishings (such as an early-nineteenth-century Regency ebony-inlaid mahogany sideboard and a pair of paintings by the eighteenth-century Austrian Franz Christopher Janneck), but the real steals are the curios: two polychrome-decorated wood trade signs in the form of a blazer and a pair of jeans and a penny-and-dime-mounted American Eagle wooden plaque. ♦ Feb. 3 at 10 A.M.: The house's latest maritime sale also features a section of medical and scientific ephemera; this new category features such items as a large mid-nineteenth-century American travelling dentist's set and a fine English orrery set from the late eighteenth century. The maritime paintings include ten works by the renowned Montague Dawson, two of which, "Shortening Sail Ahead of the Gale" and "Decks Awash in the Teeth of the Gale," are expected to realize more than a hundred thousand dollars apiece. Three leading nineteenth-century American artists—Buttersworth, Birch, and Salmon—are represented as well. ♦ Feb. 8 at 10 A.M. and 2: A sale of prints and multiples that features, in progressive degrees of minimalism, the busy grotesquerie of Picasso's etching "Untitled, Plate 120 from Series 156" (1971), Miró's lithograph "Les Amoureux et Luna Park I" (1981), the undulating contours of Matisse's "Bédouine au Long Visage" (1947), and Ellsworth Kelly's "Untitled" (1993), a lithograph of a green wedge on a white background. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.)

SWANN
Feb. 3 at 10:30 A.M.: A broad selection of skiing posters (including Sascha Maurer's iconic "Ski Lake Placid," its first three letters etched in the wakes of three schussing sportsmen) highlight Swann's winter sale of four hundred vintage posters. (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
Feb. 2 and Feb. 8 at 8 and Feb. 5 at 1:30: Jonathan Miller's production of **"Pelléas et Mélisande,"** with William Burden and Anne Sofie von Otter in the title roles, José van Dam as Golaud, Felicity Palmer as Geneviève, and Roberto Scandiuzzi as Arkel; James Levine conducts. ♦ Feb. 3 and Feb. 7 at 8: Miller's production of **"Le Nozze di Figaro,"** staged this season by Robin Guarino, is an admirably straightforward affair that sets the action firmly in the eighteenth century and lets Mozart's drama take care of itself. The promising cast is led by Janice Watson (in the role of the Countess), Andrea Rost, Jossie Pérez, Mariusz Kwiecien, and John Relyea (as Figaro); Levine. ♦ Feb. 4 at 8: **"Madama Butterfly,"** with Cynthia Lawrence, Nancy Fabiola Herrera (a début, as Suzuki), Marco Berti, and Charles Taylor; Emmanuel Villaume, an elegant interpreter of Mediterranean repertory, conducts. ♦ Feb. 5 at 8: The magnificent sprawl of Franco Zeffirelli's 1987 production of **"Turandot"**—abetted this year by Bertrand de Billy's swift but approximate conducting—has never encouraged dramatic intimacy or concentration of style. It's a luxurious platform for showboat singing; Andrea Gruber, a committed artist who has enough *squillo* for five Turandots, and Johan Botha, a sturdy, un-Italian Calàf with secure, if colorless, high notes, deliver. Krassimira Stoyanova, as Liù, is a nice discovery: her trumpetlike soprano has more than enough pliancy to project the slave girl's aching vulnerability. (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

"WORKS & PROCESS" SERIES: "PROMETHEUS"
The countertenor Derek Lee Ragin takes the leading role in a new opera-ballet by the young Juilliard faculty composer (and Milton Babbitt protégé) Jonathan Dawe, in collaboration with the New York Baroque Dance Company and the Cygnus Ensemble. (Guggenheim Museum, Fifth Ave. at 89th St. 212-423-3587. Feb. 6-7 at 8.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
Lorin Maazel and his orchestra, just back from a Midwest tour, offer a one-night-only program of orchestral favorites: Dvořák's "New World" Symphony and Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. Feb. 8 at 7:30.)

CLEVELAND ORCHESTRA
The celebrated orchestra, crafting a looser, more collegial style under its new music director, Franz Welser-Möst, offers a slate of concerts that combine Beethoven's Piano Concertos (featuring the formidable Radu Lupu) with music a little off the beaten path. All concerts begin at 8. Feb. 1: The Piano Concerto No. 1 in C Major and Shostakovich's Symphony No. 11 ("The Year 1905"). ♦ Feb. 2: The Piano Concertos Nos. 2 and 3—one gracious, the other intense—flank a performance of Roy Harris's visionary Third Symphony. ♦ Feb. 4: A meet-the-moderns night features Birtwistle's "Night's Black Bird" (in its New York première) and Dutilleux's scintillating Symphony No. 2 ("Le Double") along with the Piano Concerto No. 5, "Emperor." ♦ Feb. 5: In the final concert, Welser-Möst conducts the Piano Concerto No. 4 in G Major along with Schubert's "Unfinished" Symphony and Berg's Three Pieces for Orchestra. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800.)

GREGG SMITH SINGERS
The redoubtable choral conductor, an esteemed advocate for American works, celebrates his fiftieth-anniversary season with music by Schubert, Ives, Herbert, Elliott Carter, Brian Schober, and others. (St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 914-376-8899. Feb. 5 at 8.)

FREIBURG BAROQUE ORCHESTRA
The superb German early-music band, currently involved in a series of projects with Cecilia Bartoli, collaborates with another great singer, the soprano Christine Schäfer, in an evening of vocal and instrumental works by Bach (the Orchestral Suite No. 1 and the cantata "Weichet nur, betrübte Schatten") and Handel (including two arias from "Alcina"). (Alice Tully Hall. 212-721-6500. Feb. 6 at 5.) ♦ Note: Schäfer will also perform a solo recital (with the pianist Ted Taylor) of music by Schubert, Berg (the "Seven Early Songs"), and Strauss at Alice Tully Hall on Feb. 4 at 8. (212-721-6500.)

ORPHEUS CHAMBER ORCHESTRA
Jonathan Biss, a dynamic young American pianist, joins the conductorless chamber orchestra for a concert in which two works by Mendelssohn-Bartholdy (the Piano Concerto No. 2 in D Minor and the "Italian" Symphony) stabilize a program that includes new works by two noted young composers (jazz- and rock-influenced, respectively), Daniel Schnyder and Erkki-Sven Tüür. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Feb. 8 at 8.)

STRING ORCHESTRA OF NEW YORK
Another band of conductorless virtuosos, relative newcomers to the scene, perform new and recent

works by Paul Moravec (winner of the 2004 Pulitzer Prize for Music) and Lisa Bielawa ("The Trojan Women") along with Stravinsky's ballet music for Balanchine's "Apollon Musagète." (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. Feb. 8 at 8.)

RECITALS

RECITALS AT MERKIN CONCERT HALL
Feb. 2 at 8: The Festival Chamber Music Society (featuring the clarinettist Charles Neidich) offers a program of Crusell, David Schiff (the Divertimento from the opera "Gimpel the Fool"), and Brahms (the Piano Quartet in C Minor). (212-678-6970.) ♦ Feb. 6 at 3: In "Vassar Modfest/Vocalfest," members of the college's music faculty (including the mezzo-soprano Mary Nessinger and the composer-pianist Richard Wilson) perform novelties from the last hundred years by Egon Wellesz, Suzanne Sorkin, Wilson ("Transfigured Goat," settings of texts inspired by Joe Orton), and others. (212-501-3330.) ♦ Feb. 7 at 8: The Da Capo Chamber Players pay tribute to George Perle's ninetieth birthday, performing not only his own music (including "Critical Moments" Nos. 1 and 2) but also a piece by Schoenberg ("Pierrot Lunaire," with the soprano Lucy Shelton), his great predecessor in the twelve-tone tradition. (212-501-3330.) (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St.)

SUSANNE MENTZER
The Metropolitan Opera mezzo-soprano has long favored songs by women composers from the past (such as Alma Mahler) and present (Libby Larsen); in this recital, with the pianist Craig Rutenberg, she combines these with Schumann's "Frauenliebe und -leben," an interpretation of a woman's life by a male composer of extraordinary gifts. (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. Feb. 3 at 7:30.)

BARGEMUSIC
The spirit of new music wafts through the barge this weekend. Feb. 3-4 at 7:30: Doris Stevenson, taking a long view of the Romantic piano repertory, performs masterworks by Chopin (the Ballade in G Minor), Liszt (the Sonata in B Minor), and Frederic Rzewski ("De Profundis," in which Stevenson simultaneously plays the composer's music and recites excerpts from Wilde's memoir of imprisonment). ♦ Feb. 5 at 7:30 and Feb. 6 at 4: The baritone Chris Pedro Trakas and the pianist Michael Barrett, well known for their advocacy of contemporary vocal music, return to more traditional fare with Schubert's "Winterreise." (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

BANG ON A CAN ALL-STARS
For the last seven years, in keeping with its professed nonestablishment attitude, the composer's collaborative has let its fans in on the process of commissioning new pieces through private donations. At the annual People's Commissioning Fund concert, donors get to experience the fruit of their patronage—in this case, works by the avant-garde country singer and performance artist Cynthia Hopkins, the Tin Hat Trio violinist Carla Kihlstedt, and JG Thirlwell, founder of the sonic-rock group Foetus. As a chaser, Philip Glass sits in with the group on keyboard to perform his "Music in Similar Motion." (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. Feb. 3 at 8.)

"ACCOLADES" SERIES: GIORA SCHMIDT
The young violinist makes his New York recital début with a program of sonatas by Franck, Handel, and Hindemith, along with Falla's "Suite Populaire Espagnole" and a clutch of Kreisler encores. (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 212-570-3949. Feb. 3 at 8.)

PAUL BADURA-SKODA
The doyen of Viennese pianists plays an all-Schubert recital at the Austrian Cultural Forum (see This Week). (11 E. 52nd St. Feb. 4 at 8. For free tickets, which are required, call 212-772-1132.)

ST. LUKE'S CHAMBER ENSEMBLE: "SCHICKELE RE-MIX"
The lastest project in the group's "Second Helpings" series is a concert devoted to serious music by Peter Schickele, a.k.a. P.D.Q. Bach—his String Sextet (1990) and "Summer Trio" (1966), along with music by his beloved mentor Darius Milhaud and by his son, Matthew Schickele. (Chelsea Art Museum, Eleventh Ave. at 22nd St. 212-594-6100. Feb. 5 at 2.)

KRONOS QUARTET
After spending decades crafting her idiosyncratic music-theatre pieces, Meredith Monk has turned her talent to the traditional form of the string quartet—though it must surely help to have Kronos, that most untraditional of string quartets, in mind. The American première of her "Stringsongs" is the highlight of this concert, which also features a group of New York premières by such composers as Michael Gordon. (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. Feb. 5 at 7:30.)

VISTA LYRICA
A new chamber trio (the pianist Beth Levin, the clarinettist Neil Rynston, and the cellist Daniel Barrett) plays classic works by Brahms, Beethoven, Bruch, and Zemlinsky at an intimate venue. (Faust Harrison Pianos, 205 W. 58th St. Feb. 6 at 6. A donation is suggested.)

NAUMBURG FOUNDATION CONCERTS: LEONIDAS KAVAKOS
Kavakos, who won the Naumburg Violin Award in 1988, offers interpretations of standard and more adventurous works with both a fiery sound and a cool, abstract style. He comes back under the foundation's wing for a recital featuring Bartók's Violin Rhapsody No. 1 and sonatas by Schumann, Enescu, and Bach. Dénes Varjon is at the keyboard. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-875-5050. Feb. 7 at 8.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

"FIRST SATURDAY"
The Brooklyn Museum's monthly party celebrates carnival and Black History Month with a pre-Fat Tuesday samba dance (lessons will be provided), along with a chance to make collages à la Romare Bearden, performances of traditional Afro-Brazilian music and dance, and other activities. There will also be a Marilyn Monroe look-alike contest—which seems out of place until you take into account the museum's current show "I Wanna Be Loved by You: Photographs of Marilyn Monroe from the Leon and Michaela Constantiner Collection"—and a screening of the 1955 Monroe classic, "The Seven Year Itch." (200 Eastern Parkway. 718-638-5000. Feb. 5 from 5 to 11.)

READINGS
Feb. 2 at 7: Alice Munro makes a rare New York City appearance as the actress Joan Allen reads from her new short-story collection, "Runaway." (Paula Cooper Gallery, 521 W. 21st St. For reservations, which are required, call 212-255-4022.) ♦ Feb. 6 at 3: The journalist Jennifer Gonnerman ("Life on the Outside: The Prison Odyssey of Elaine Bartlett") and the food critic Robert Sietsema ("The Food Lover's Guide to the Best Ethnic Eating in New York City") read from their work. (Sunny's, 253 Conover St., between Beard and Reed Sts., Red Hook, Brooklyn. For more information, call 718-875-3677.) ♦ Feb. 7 at 8: Pete Dexter, who is on his first book tour in more than ten years, offers selections from his latest novel, "Train." Edward P. Jones, the winner of the 2004 Pulitzer Prize for his novel "The Known World," shares the stage. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500.)

TALKS
Feb. 7 at 6:30: The Shakespeare Society presents the actor and director Roger Rees and the theatre critic John Simon, who will screen clips from films of "Macbeth," "Richard III," and "Othello" and discuss the work of Sir Ian McKellen. (Kaye Playhouse, Hunter College, Park Ave. at 68th St. For more information, call 212-327-2253.) ♦ Feb. 7 at 7:30: Mark Kurlansky, the author of "Cod" and "Salt," discusses his new book, "1968: The Year That Rocked the World." (Barnes & Noble, 4 Astor Pl. No tickets necessary.) ♦ Feb. 8 at 6: David Remnick, the editor of this magazine, discusses *The New Yorker's* eighty-year history. (General Society Library, 20 W. 44th St. For more information, call 212-302-8078.)

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MOVIES OPENING

ASSISTED LIVING
A début comedic drama from the writer-director Elliot Greenebaum, in which a slacker janitor at a nursing home plays pranks on the residents. Opening Feb. 2. (Angelika Film Center.)

BOOGEYMAN
A horror movie about a young man (Barry Watson) who returns home to face his childhood demons, literally. Directed by Stephen T. Kay. Opening Feb. 4.

DAYBREAK
Björn Runge wrote and directed this triptych film, which follows twenty-four hours in the lives of a middle-aged doctor, a bricklayer, and a divorcée. In Swedish. Opening Feb. 2. (Film Forum.)

NOBODY KNOWS
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Feb. 4. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

RORY O'SHEA WAS HERE
Two patients in a Dublin home for the disabled attempt to live on their own, in a drama directed by Damien O'Donnell. With Steven Robertson, James McAvoy, and Romola Garai. Opening Feb. 4. (42nd Street E Walk and Union Square.)

SWIMMING UPSTREAM
A fifties period drama about a promising Australian swimmer, Tony Fingleton (Jesse Spencer), and his dysfunctional family. With Geoffrey Rush and Judy Davis. Directed by Russell Mulcahy. Opening Feb. 4.

THE WEDDING DATE
In a romantic comedy directed by Claire Kilner, a Manhattan woman (Debra Messing) hires an escort (Dermot Mulroney) to accompany her to her sister's wedding. Opening Feb. 4.

SOUND
SCENE
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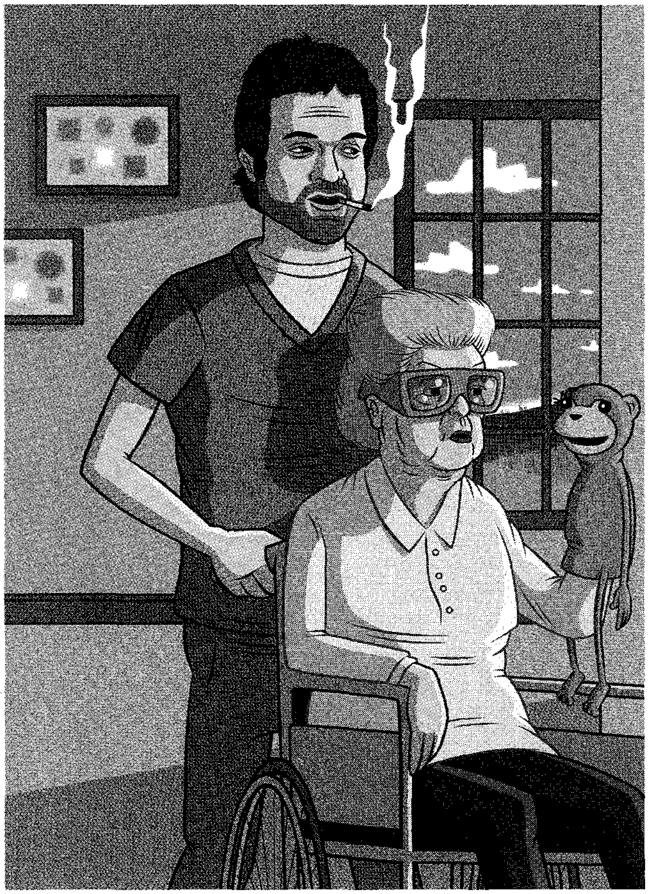
FILM NOTES

ANDREW LLOYD WEBBER'S THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA
A bold but fruitless attempt to disguise the fact that Lloyd Webber's extravaganza belongs on the stage. Theatre audiences, an easily tickled crowd, may still be aroused by the sight of dry ice being puffed across the footlights, but moviegoers, who regularly witness whole cities being trashed, are made of sterner stuff. They are also liable to feel cheated by weak casting, and thus the choice of Gerard Butler (the Phantom), Emmy Rossum (Christine, his protégée), and Patrick Wilson (the Vicomte, her No. 2 squeeze) is unlikely to find universal favor. The score remains a cunning consolation to those who are frightened by the thought of real opera, and the director and co-writer is Joel Schumacher, which means that the enterprise is best viewed, if at all, as a prolonged exercise in interior decoration. With Minnie Driver, enjoying herself no end as a screaming diva.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 1/3/05.) (Cinema 1, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

ASSAULT ON PRECINCT 13
Ethan Hawke stars in this tense and involving update of John Carpenter's influential 1976 police action thriller, which was in turn based on the 1959 Howard Hawks Western "Rio Bravo." The director, Jean-François Richet, opens the film with a slam-bang drug deal gone wrong and then slows things down for some character development—a decision that feels truly retro. The bulk of the film takes place inside a police station that's being attacked by a bunch of crooked cops. The cast includes Laurence Fishburne, Maria Bello, Ja Rule, and Drea de Matteo, all of whom give strong, no-frills performances. There's a simplicity to Richet's staging of the assault that harks back to the gritty, muscular work of Don Siegel, the director of such films as "Dirty Harry" and "The Shootist."—*Bruce Diones* (Battery Park 11, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)


Michael Bonsignore in "Assisted Living," opening February 2.

MICHAEL WELDON

THE AVIATOR
The billionaire madman, the taloned hermit of Las Vegas eating nothing but steak and peas—that was the haggard face in the tabloids that millions of us knew in the years before Howard Hughes's death, in 1976. Martin Scorsese's brilliantly entertaining movie goes back to the period when Hughes (Leonardo DiCaprio) was an exhilaratingly handsome and daring young man. The narrative, concocted by the screenwriter John Logan, is not meant to be taken literally. It's a fantasia about a studly capitalist prince who produces and directs movies, designs and flies airplanes, and sleeps with dozens of beautiful actresses and starlets. Scorsese and the designer Dante Ferretti press the young tycoon into the svelte Art Deco look of the period; in his tuxedos and casual beige flying duds, Hughes becomes the pictorial embodiment of restless bravado. Toward the end, there are glimpses of the germ-haunted paranoid that Hughes would become, but the movie is consistently lighthearted and engaging, a sort of pop "Citizen Kane." With Cate Blanchett doing a nervy imitation of Katharine Hepburn, Alec Baldwin as Hughes's rival, and Alan Alda as the corrupt Maine senator Owen Brewster.—*David Denby* (12/20 & 27/04) (Battery Park 11, Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema 1, East 86th Street Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

CLOSER
Patrick Marber has adapted his own hit play, of the same name, and given the lucky director, Mike Nichols, a script that he can chew on. Some viewers, or listeners, may flinch at the profanity here, or at the level of honesty that demands such profane expression, but peel away the carnal talk and what you are left with—the bone structure of the piece—is not so different from Noël Coward's "Private Lives." We get two interlocking couples: Dan (Jude Law), a writer who falls in love with Alice (Natalie Portman), a night-club stripper, and Larry (Clive Owen), a doctor who marries a photographer called Anna (Julia Roberts). The transactions are quick and brutal: Dan has anonymous online sex with Larry and a yearlong affair with Anna, Alice leaves Dan and finds work at a club, Larry finds her there and tells her precisely what he wants, and nobody is happy. The film is more civilized than the play, the acid slightly diluted, yet Law, for one, looks eaten away by the bitter pace of it all. Roberts, too, is haunted and pained, whereas Portman and Owen drink and spit their lines with undiminished relish, often at speeds that Nichols can barely handle. Not recommended for couples on a first date.—*A.L.* (12/13/04) (Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, 64th and 2nd, and Village Theatre VII.)

FINDING NEVERLAND
Marc Forster, the director who brought us "Monster's Ball," has turned his attention—as one does—from Halle Berry to J. M. Barrie. The diminutive Scottish author is played by Johnny Depp, in a loose fantasia on the genesis of "Peter Pan." Barrie meets some young boys in a London park, and from his friendship with them and their widowed mother (Kate Winslet) he conjures a story of a child who cannot, or will not, grow up. The fact that the film takes liberties with the historical record (there were five brothers, for instance, not four) is a minor affair; more misguided is the reliance on whimsy, at moments where the real Barrie was straightforward, even chilly, in his imaginings. At other times, however, the movie's air of slightness and evanescence feels touching and right, and, if the result strikes you as too weepy for its own good, consider that the actual story of Barrie and his "Lost Boys"—some of whom met untimely deaths—was worse and more troubling by far. With Julie Christie, Dustin Hoffman, and, in the role of a real Peter, the clear and unsentimental Freddie Highmore.—*A.L.* (East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, and New York Twin.)

HOTEL RWANDA
Paul Rusesabagina (Don Cheadle), the Rwandan manager of the four-star Hôtel des Mille Collines, in Kigali, wears a blue suit and tie and is very polite, even deferential, toward everyone. Paul works for the Belgian company that owns the hotel, which has become an oasis for Europeans and for African élites. When the Hutu massacres of the Tutsi minority begin, in the spring of 1994, Paul keeps the Mille Collines running. He also, on the

sly, establishes it as a haven for both Hutu and Tutsi fugitives, keeping them momentarily safe from the machete-wielding militia, who kill eight hundred thousand people in a few months. Working in Rwanda and South Africa, the writer-director, Terry George, convincingly stages the horrors outside the hotel: the paralyzing fear in the night, the vilely inciting radio broadcasts, the chaos and arbitrary madness of the slaughter. But the true drama of "Hotel Rwanda" lies in the character of Paul, who is betrayed by the Europeans who formed him but who holds to his belief in civility, right through the worst disasters. The movie is a triumph for Cheadle—he never steps outside the character for emotional grandstanding or easy moralism.—*D.D.* (12/20 & 27/04) (Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, Battery Park 11, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, and 19th Street East 6.)

HOUSE OF FLYING DAGGERS

Not a sequel to "Hero," the fantastical hit of the summer, but a chance for the same director, Zhang Yimou, to paint the screen red with his luscious and newly invigorated style. In the middle of the ninth century, two regional policemen (Andy Lau and Takeshi Kaneshiro) take on the might of the Flying Daggers, a furtive antigovernment organization. Their first break is to arrest Mei (Ziyi Zhang), a blind dancer who has all sorts of tricks up her sleeves, most of them liable to cut your throat. One cop goes undercover, hoping that Mei can be seduced into revealing the villains' lair. There is an unembarrassed scent of melodrama to all this, as if Zhang's plot had been infected by the excess of his violent ballets—the knives, arrows, kicks, and leaps with which every contest is resolved, and by which the characters demonstrate their respect for one another and their scorn for the laws of physics. At some point, though, the poise falters, and the movie, unlike "Hero," tips into silliness; in the lust to register nothing but beautiful patterns of movement, the claims of logic, political fear, and even love are blithely blown away. In Mandarin.—*A.L.* (12/13/04) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Union Square.)

IN GOOD COMPANY

Topher Grace, almost unimaginably slender and young-looking, displaces the solid, rooted, fiftyish husband and father Dennis Quaid as the head of ad sales for an established sports magazine. Grace is now the boss, and though he knows how to deliver conglomerate-synergy spiel and get people "psyched" he hasn't a clue as to how to live his life. This brilliant orphan boy then falls in love with Quaid's college-age daughter, Scarlett Johansson. Paul Weitz's movie is synthetically plotted, but it has been written and directed with a heartening sensitivity, and Grace and Johansson are adorable together. Weitz offers some sharp (and not inaccurate) thrusts at the nastier side of corporate "culture." A commercial comedy made by people who know what they are doing.—*D.D.* (Battery Park 11, Beekman, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

JACKIE BROWN

Quentin Tarantino's often hilarious 1997 adaptation of Elmore Leonard's "Rum Punch" is his most tense and sustained picture, even with its epic length. Set in the sun-kissed Southern California suburbs, it's a great American movie about men and women testing the limits of their characters in middle age. The hero and heroine are a bail bondsman (Robert Forster) and a woman he's been hired to bail out, a stewardess with a money-smuggling sideline (Pam Grier). But the film proves equally compelling when dealing with her ruthless gun-runner boss (Samuel L. Jackson), his beach-babe moll (Bridget Fonda), and his fresh-from-the-joint old pal and partner (Robert De Niro). Forster offers an assured, attractive portrait of mature virility, and Grier, with her beauty at full ripeness, is effortlessly expressive.—*Michael Sragow* (Museum of Modern Art; Feb. 3 and Feb. 5.)

THE LIFE AQUATIC WITH STEVE ZISSOU

The latest movie from Wes Anderson, after "Rushmore" and "The Royal Tenenbaums," marks another bid to swim away from the mainstream. Bill Murray plays Steve Zissou, an old-style explorer of the seas, who could easily be a mad American cousin, twice removed, of Jacques Cousteau. Steve has a tall, peculiar wife (Anjelica Huston) and an even taller and more peculiar rival (Jeff Goldblum). The plot, such as it is, concerns the hunting down of a jaguar shark, which has chewed up one of Steve's associates; at the same time, our hero is coping with the appearance of a young man (Owen Wilson) who claims to be his son. This level of weirdness could, in other hands, appear forced and willful, but Anderson seems at ease with his conceits, allowing his cast—which includes Willem Dafoe and, with a ringing British accent, Cate Blanchett—to relax into the demands of deadpan. Hardly anybody here looks young, and we can only guess at the experiences that have aged them, tested them, and cloaked them in Anderson's brand of sadness. Set against that, we get joyous bursts of David Bowie: "Space Oddity," "Rebel Rebel," and other hits, many of them transposed, naturally enough, into Portuguese. With silly, fetching marine animation sequences by Henry Selick.—*A.L.* (1/17/05) (Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Village East Cinemas.)

THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

Michael Radford's film of "The Merchant of Venice" stars Al Pacino as Shylock, and the look of him—heavy of tread, eyes darting and wary—defines the encompassing mood. The text has been sliced and pared, and what remains is intimate and sorrowful, as if the characters knew from the start what manner of tribulation they would face. Antonio (Jeremy Irons) seems already to be mourning the loss not just of his ships at sea but of his friend Bassanio (Joseph Fiennes) to the wealthy and marriageable Portia (Lynn Collins). Her early scenes are the weakest in the movie, the comedy of the semi-fantastic sitting uneasily amid the gathering gloom. What Radford does best—and it's a trick he mislaid in the slower niceties of "Il Postino"—is to shove and wheedle the story along, so that the court scene and even the final bickering over marital rings take on the air not merely of patchings-up but of bristling suspense. Much is at stake here, and, to judge by Pacino's burning gaze, the loser, in so villainous a society, is never really in doubt.—*A.L.* (1/3/05) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, and 72nd Street East.)

MILLION DOLLAR BABY

Much of Clint Eastwood's evocative and poetic boxing movie is set in the Hit Pit, a moldy, sweat-stained downtown Los Angeles gym in which crusty veterans train a few serious fighters and many hapless punks. Scrap (Morgan Freeman), an ex-fighter with one functioning eye, works at the gym and exchanges affectionately nasty remarks with the owner, one Frankie Dunn (Eastwood). Against his better judgment, Frankie agrees to take on a tough country woman, Maggie Fitzgerald (Hilary Swank), who, not entirely to our surprise, rapidly becomes the hottest fighter in the sordid but lucrative world of women's boxing. The story, adapted by Paul Haggis from F. X. Toole's collection, "Rope Burns," is borderline trite, but the movie has the sweet melancholy of a great jazz piece.—*D.D.* (12/20 & 27/04) (Angelika Film Center, Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema 1, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, and Lincoln Square.)

LOS OLVIDADOS

Set in Mexico, Luis Buñuel's ruthless—almost surgical—examination of how the poor prey on one another is the most horrifying of all films about juvenile crime. The one masterwork on this subject, it stands apart from the genre by its pitilessness, its controlled passion. Buñuel doesn't treat his characters as ideas but as morally responsible human beings; there is little of the familiar American-movie cant that makes everyone responsible for juvenile crimes except the juveniles. There's no pathos in this film; it's a squalid tragedy that causes the viewer to feel a moral terror. Buñuel, whose early work fascinated Freud, creates scenes that shock one psychologically. Among them here is the mother-meat dream—perhaps the greatest of all movie dream sequences; it is disturbing long after the lacerations of the more realistic material

YUNDI LI
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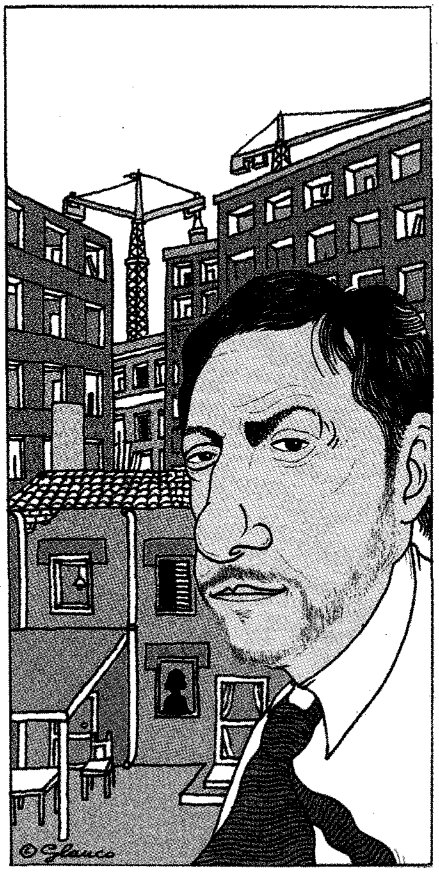
have healed. Buñuel had intended much more in this surreal vein, but he did not have a completely free hand. For example, in the scene in which one of the boys goes to beat up and kill another boy, the camera reveals in the distance a huge eleven-story building under construction; Buñuel had wanted to put an orchestra of a hundred musicians in the building. In Spanish. Released in 1950.—*Pauline Kael* (Film Forum; Feb. 2-8.)

RAGING BULL
Martin Scorsese's film based on the life of the former middleweight champ Jake La Motta (played by Robert De Niro) is a biography of the prizefight genre; it's also about movies and about violence, it's about gritty visual rhythm, it's about Brando, it's about the "Godfather" pictures—it's about Scorsese and De Niro's trying to top what they've done and what everybody else has done. Scorsese puts his unmediated obsessions on the screen, trying to turn raw, pulp power into art by removing it from the particulars of observation and narrative. He loses the lowlife entertainment values of prizefight films; he aestheticizes pulp and kills it. De Niro put on more than fifty pounds to play the older, drunken La Motta; he seems a swollen puppet. With Cathy Moriarty, whose Vickie La Motta is a beautiful icon—a big, lacquered virgin-doll of the forties—and Joe Pesci as Joey La Motta. Released in 1980.—*P.K.* (Ziegfeld.)



At Walter Reade Theatre, the films of the Italian actor Sergio Castellitto.

YI YI
It begins with a wedding and ends with a funeral, and, in a style that could only be called radiantly matter-of-fact, Edward Yang's movie encompasses the life of a large Taiwanese family and such central elements of middle-class existence as business ethics and the disillusionment of reaching the age of forty-five. The characters, including an engineer at a troubled computer-hardware firm, live in an Americanized work environment, yet certain emotions nearly lost to Americans, such as modesty and shame, still rule their lives. Yang works very deliberately; you have to slow yourself down to get into the pace of the movie, but once you do every shot seems momentous. He doesn't carve up the space—he frames it, and he excels at portraiture. A character stands alone, in a doorway or at a window, and Yang is so attentive that he gets the revelation that he wants, tenderly, quietly, before moving on. With Wu Nienjen as the executive father and Jonathan Chang as his indomitably curious little boy. In English, Hokkien, and Mandarin. Released in 2000.—*D.D.* (Anthology Film Archives; Feb. 3.)

ALSO PLAYING

BAD EDUCATION (11/22/04)
BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Sunshine Cinema.
BEING JULIA
Quad Cinema and 62nd & Broadway.
BORN INTO BROTHELS
Film Forum.
HEAD-ON
Angelika Film Center.
SIDEWAYS (10/25/04)
BAM Rose Cinemas, Battery Park 11, Chelsea Cinemas, East 85th Street, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.
TARNATION (10/18/04)
Cinema Village.
VERA DRAKE (10/11/04)
Village East Cinemas.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

Unless noted, call 212-777-FILM for show times.

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn.
Battery Park 11, West St. at Vesey St.
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinemas 1, 2, and 3, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (212-924-3363).
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
Empire 25, on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave. (212-398-3939).
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St. (212-757-2280).
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
MetroTwin, Broadway at 99th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 66th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (212-688-3800).
Pioneer Theatre, 155 E. 3rd St. (212-254-3300).
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
Sunshine Cinema, 143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182).
34th Street Theatre, 312 W. 34th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5110)—Edward Yang films. Feb. 2 at 7:30: "That Day, on the Beach" (1982). ♦ Feb. 3 at 7:30: "Yi Yi" (†). ♦ Première screening. Feb. 3-8 at 7:30: "Oh! Man" (2004, Yervant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi). ♦ A retrospective of the films of the Taiwanese New Wave director Hou Hsiao-Hsien. Feb. 4 at 7 and Feb. 8 at 9:30: "A Time to Live and a Time to Die" (1985). ♦ Feb. 4 at 10 and Feb. 8 at 7: "Dust in the Wind" (1987). ♦ Feb. 5 at 2:30 and Feb. 7 at 7: "The Green, Green Grass of Home" (1982). ♦ Feb. 5 at 4:30 and Feb. 7 at 9: "The Boys from Fengkuei" (1983). ♦ Feb. 5 at 7: "Daughter of the Nile" (1987). ♦ Feb. 5 at 9: "A City of Sadness" (1989). ♦ Feb. 6 at 3:30: "The Puppetmaster" (1993). ♦ Feb. 6 at 7: "Good Men, Good Women" (1995). ♦ Feb. 6 at 9:15: "Goodbye South, Goodbye" (1996). ♦ Stan Brakhage films. Feb. 5 at 5: "The Pittsburgh Trilogy" (1970-71). ♦ Feb. 6 at 5:30: "The Text of Light" (1974).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—New print. Feb. 2-8 at 1:30, 3:30, 5:30, 7:30, and 9:30: "Los Olvidados" (†).

FLORENCE GOULD HALL
55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—A Claire Denis retrospective. All films are in French. Feb. 8 at 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, and 9: "Against Oblivion" (1991).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—Feb. 2 at 5:30 and Feb. 5 at 2:30: "Man of Aran" (1934, Robert Flaherty). ♦ Feb. 2 at 6 and Feb. 5 at 5:30: "Through the Olive Trees" (1994, Abbas Kiarostami; in Farsi). ♦ Feb. 2 at 7:30 and Feb. 5 at 2: "Notorious" (1946, Alfred Hitchcock). ♦ Feb. 2 at 8:15 and Feb. 3 at 5:30: "Holy Smoke" (1999, Jane Campion). ♦ Feb. 3 at 8: "Bonjour Tristesse" (1958, Otto Preminger). ♦ Feb. 3 at 8:30 and Feb. 5 at 8: "Jackie Brown" (†). ♦ Feb. 4 at 5:30 and Feb. 7 at 8:15: "Captain Blood" (1935, Michael Curtiz). ♦ Feb. 4 at 6 and Feb. 6 at 5: "The Cook, the Thief, His Wife, and Her Lover" (1989, Peter Greenaway). ♦ Feb. 4 at 8 and Feb. 7 at 6: "The Straight Story" (1999, David Lynch). ♦ Feb. 4 at 8:30: "My Left Foot" (1989, Jim Sheridan). ♦ Feb. 5 at 5: "Contempt" (1963, Jean-Luc Godard; in French). ♦ Feb. 5 at 8:15: "Ju Dou" (1990, Zhang Yimou; in Mandarin). ♦ Feb. 6 at 2: "The Killing" (1956, Stanley Kubrick). ♦ Feb. 6 at 2:30: Seven comedies by Louis Feuillade. ♦ Feb. 6 at 4:30: Four melodramas by Feuillade. ♦ Feb. 7 at 5:30: "Paris Is Burning" (1990, Jennie Livingston).

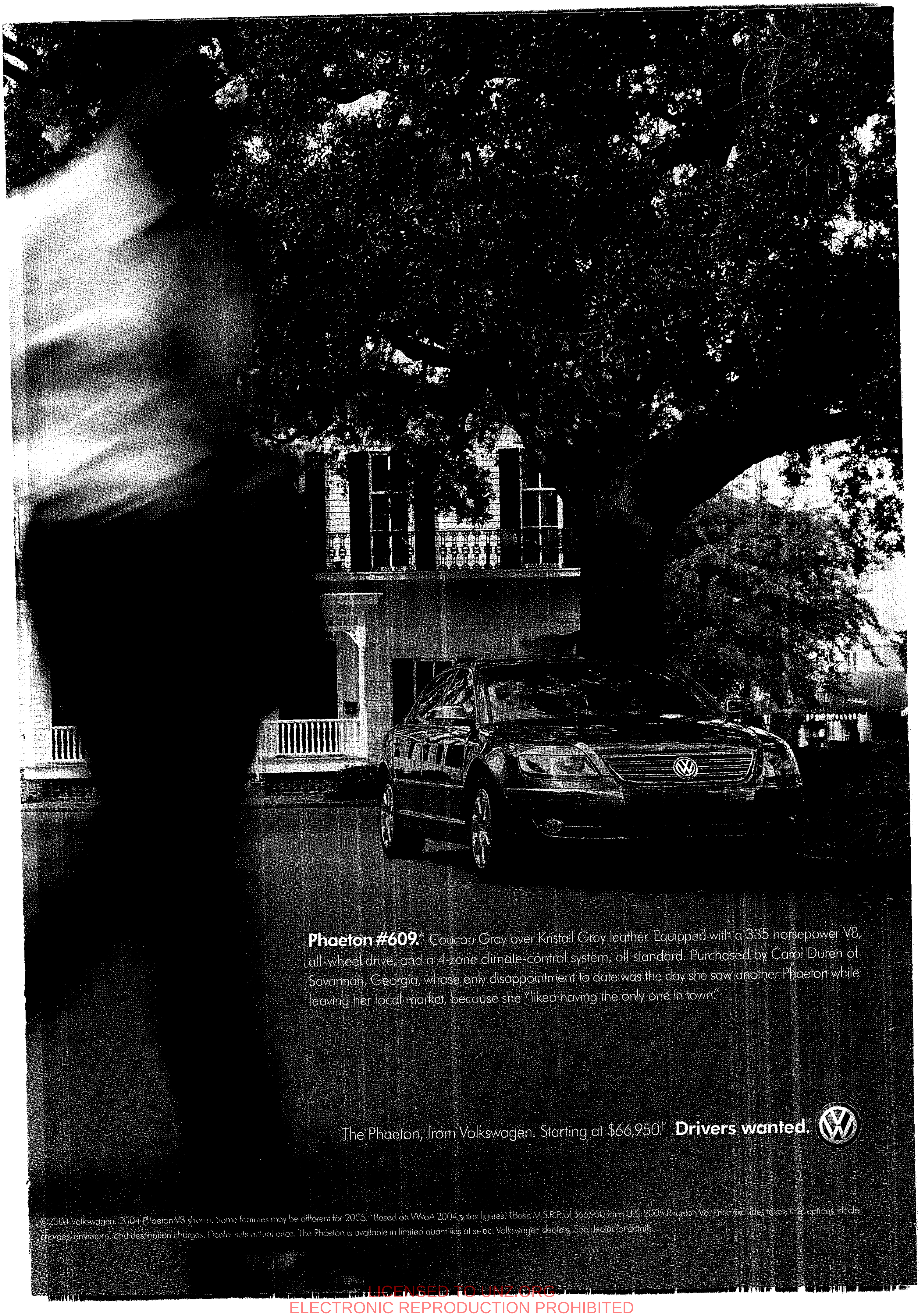
MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Through Feb. 13: Films selected by the New York Film Critics Circle. Feb. 5 at 2: "Carnal Knowledge" (1971, Mike Nichols). ♦ Feb. 5 at 4:30: "Irreversible" (2002, Gaspar Noé; in French). ♦ Feb. 6 at 2: "Touch of Evil" (1958, Orson Welles). ♦ Feb. 6 at 4:30: "Ford Transit" (2002, Hany Abu-Assad). ♦ Repertory nights. Feb. 5-6 at 6:30: "Bob le Flambeur" (1955, Jean-Pierre Melville; in French).

SUNSHINE CINEMA
143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—Midnight movies. Feb. 4-5: "Blue Velvet" (1986, David Lynch).

THALIA THEATRE
Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—Feb. 5 at 6: "Sullivan's Travels" (1941, Preston Sturges). ♦ Feb. 5 at 8:15: "The Love Parade" (1929, Ernst Lubitsch). ♦ Feb. 6 at 2: "S.O.B." (1981, Blake Edwards). ♦ Feb. 6 at 4:45: "The Party" (1968, Edwards).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—Through Feb. 7: "Our Man of the Hour: Sergio Castellitto." All films are in Italian. Feb. 2 at 1 and 7:30 and Feb. 5 at 2:30: "Padre Pio" (2000, Carlo Carlei). ♦ Feb. 2 at 5: "The Great Pumpkin" (1993, Francesca Archibugi). ♦ Feb. 3 at 2 and 6:15 and Feb. 6 at 4: "He Looks Dead, But He's Only Fainted" (1986, Felice Farina). ♦ Feb. 3 at 4 and 8:15 and Feb. 5 at 8:45: "The Flesh" (1991, Marco Ferreri). ♦ Feb. 4 at 2 and 6:15, Feb. 6 at 2, and Feb. 7 at 4:15: "Alberto Express" (1990, Arthur Joffé). ♦ Feb. 4 at 4 and 8:15, Feb. 6 at 6, and Feb. 7 at 8:30: "Local Call" (2004, Joffé). ♦ Feb. 5 at 6:30, Feb. 6 at 8:15, and Feb. 7 at 2 and 6:15: "Mostly Martha" (2001, Sandra Nettlebeck).

GLAUCO DELLA SCIUCCA



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BETWEEN WAVES

FICTION BY JONATHAN LOWY

Part two in a series. In part one, we found a man, his wife, Dianna, and his mother, Greta, on a voyage aboard Queen Mary 2. Upon departure, the narrator learned about his father: a German, a first-class traveler his mother met on Queen Mary, a man he never knew.

They never saw each other again, my parents. It was just that tiny handful of time crossing the Atlantic, in that nether zone between nations and wars, on Queen Mary in 1938. Then it was over.

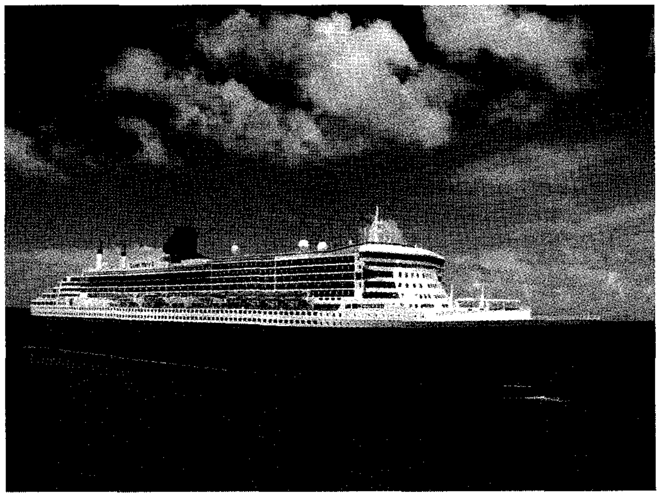
My father spotted her first. Across the ballroom, silver-hued and shimmering she seemed, but it was just the cut glass from the ceiling light, the way the moonlight refracted off the waves through the windows.

She was turned away from him, the back of her black velvet dress scooped out, her black boyish hair set off by a white band. Then she swirled slowly toward him, revealing an uncertain smile. A big band, tuxedoes and tails, whipped into some fast jazz. Couples broke into the conga, then the foxtrot. The music kept time with the rocking waves.

It's not a ship, someone said. *A floating city*, said another. *No. Heaven. Let's never get off.*

The Great War was almost twenty years past, and he had been there, back when the world learned its final lesson in war, at that magical hour when the guns fell silent. And here on the Cunard liner the same feeling took hold: brutality receding, a fading dream.

They arranged to meet for tennis, a stroll on the Prom Deck. At dinner she devoured lobster and duckling and Ox Tongue Florentine; his eyes drank in her innocent exuberance. Then drinks, dancing to a new band. They chased each other down corridors that reconfigured themselves each night (maybe it was the Veuve Cliquot, the martinis). They opened a door and found their evening by chance, serendipity.



Things he didn't tell her: The way gunfire hangs heavy over the trenches; he had seen enough of war. His family he left back in Berlin, loyal and well-connected. The secrets he brought with him—formulas, theorems—that he was determined to reveal in his new home.

They spent a day behind locked cabin doors.

They made an unspoken pact to avoid their native tongue; they would struggle through English and silence. They were starting a new life.

At night they slipped back out into the floating world.

There was a French couple at the bar, there were Englishmen, and Swedes. This was a world unhinged from nationhood and place, this city on the water. Southampton to New York; April 1938.

Things she didn't tell him: Her ticket was tourist third class. She had snuck past a battalion of society police to infiltrate the ballroom. She was just eighteen, a Jew. Her family she left behind in Berlin.

At the Verandah Grill they watched some movie star, his cocktail shaker propelling him into pirouettes, the crowd erupting around him. She swirled the raspberry sauce atop her ice cream in a reverse S.

When they returned to his cabin they watched, through the porthole, dolphins leap, birds from who knows where, the geyser of a whale. Surrealism was in the air. It was the comic subconscious; the world would never make sense again.

He refused to make plans but she insisted: somewhere on Broadway one midnight in May. They would find each other.

Did they know what the world had in store for them, once they set foot back on land? That it was only the ocean, this buoyant city, that kept their love afloat?

They locked the cabin doors again. And nine months later, I was born.

To Be Continued

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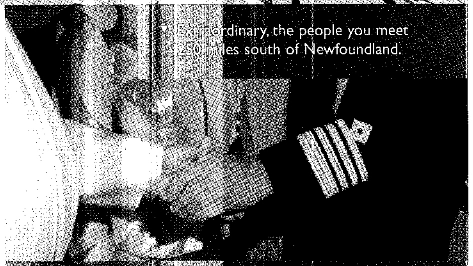

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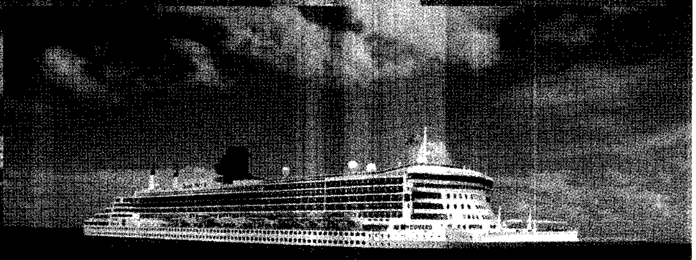

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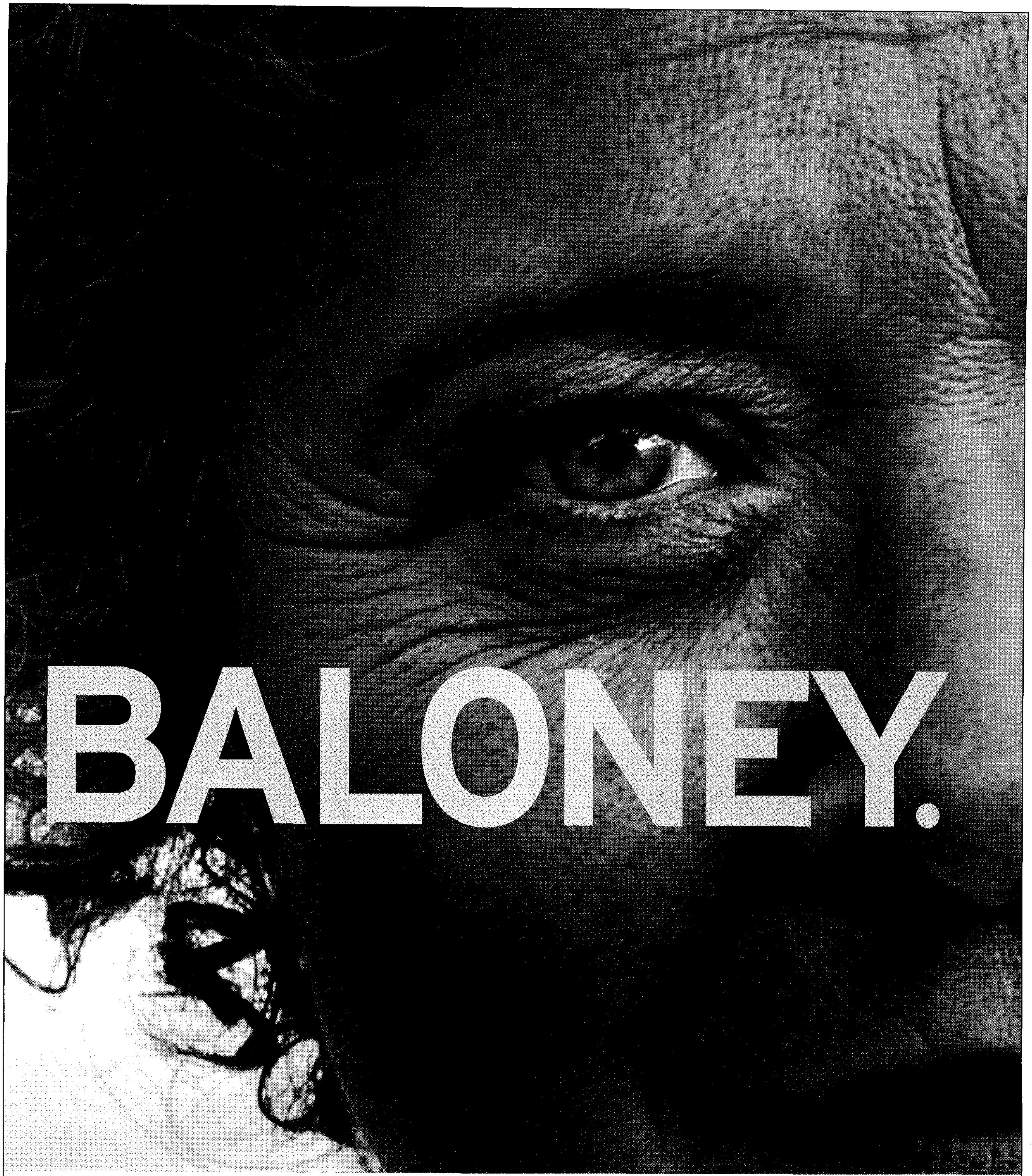

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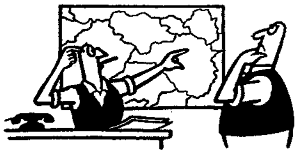
THE NEW YORKER

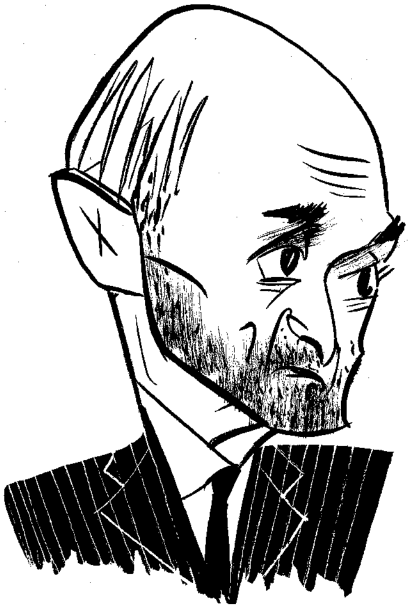
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
HOMELAND INSECURITY



It's not easy to remember, but we didn't always think of ourselves as a target-rich country. A rich country, sure, but terms such as "target-rich" and all that they imply hadn't penetrated everyday American awareness. Today, nearly everyone who studies the sources of potential terrorism, particularly the global jihadist movement, believes that more attacks are inevitable. Stephen Flynn, in his book "America the Vulnerable," likens this period to the Phony War—the eight months, beginning in September, 1939, after Hitler had invaded Poland, and Britain and France had declared war on Germany, when essentially nothing happened. The United States hasn't been attacked for more than three years now, an extraordinarily happy fact for which the Bush Administration is quick to take the credit. If that changes, the Department of Homeland Security seems well positioned to take the blame.

The government reorganization around the launch of the department, in 2002, was, as President Bush pointed out, the largest since 1947, when the National Security Act created the Department of Defense, the Air Force, and the Central Intelligence Agency. D.H.S. swallowed whole the Coast Guard, the Secret Service, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency. It subsumed and restructured the Customs Service, the Border Patrol, and the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Even the F.B.I. had to fight off its embrace. The newborn agency was gawky and formless, but one of its core missions, at least, was clear. D.H.S. would, the President said, "review intelligence and law-enforcement information from all agencies of government and produce a single daily picture of threats against our homeland." This mandate, it was hoped, would help prevent the kind of intelligence failures that allowed the September 11th attacks to succeed: two of the hijackers, for example, had been on a C.I.A. watch list that wasn't shared in time with other agencies. Indeed, the government kept a dozen separate lists of suspected terrorists. Such information clearly needed to be collated in a single command center.



Michael Chertoff

That hasn't happened. The Administration, responsive to the claims of the big intelligence-collecting agencies—the Pentagon, the C.I.A., and the F.B.I.—quietly scaled back the intelligence function of D.H.S. to the point that fifteen qualified people who were asked to become its intelligence chief turned down the job. The department was unable even to attract a full team of analysts. Some observers called D.H.S. a Frankenstein; others saw a dinosaur—big body, small brain. Meanwhile, Tom Ridge, the department's secretary, proved no match for his Cabinet rivals, Donald Rumsfeld and John Ashcroft. The Defense Department simply pursued its own homeland-security programs, while the Justice Department absconded with D.H.S.'s authority to investigate terrorist financing. Last spring, when Ashcroft announced a major new terror threat, he seemed to catch Ridge by surprise.

The department hasn't done much better in other areas. In November, 2001, President Bush signed a law requiring that all cargo on commercial flights be screened. That is a D.H.S. responsibility. Two years later, less than five per cent of cargo on passenger planes was being screened. Clark Ervin, a veteran of the first Bush's White House who was appointed the department's inspector general, found, in 2003, that he could sneak weapons and explosives past the screeners at fifteen airports. At the same time, he noted, senior managers at the Transportation Security Administration were giving themselves the largest annual bonuses of

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

any federal agency. Ervin produced a series of reports on other gross lapses—in contract monitoring, in port security—in what he called a "dysfunctional bureaucracy." In December, the White House replaced him.

When it comes to improving industrial-security practices, the department's record is equally dismal. Air cargo is not comprehensively screened because the airlines don't want to take on the expense of doing it. Nearly all the nation's chemical plants, refineries, and storage facilities remain basically unprotected, and, according to the Environmental Protection Agency, seven hundred are in locations where an attack could cause more than a hundred thousand casualties. Yet the chemical industry has effectively lobbied against legislation that would require plants to improve security in favor of what is essentially self-regulation, and D.H.S. has accepted that.

Perhaps the ultimate sign of the Administration's slack, purely political attitude toward D.H.S. came when President Bush nominated Bernard Kerik to succeed Ridge. Kerik had campaigned diligently for Bush in 2004. Bush liked him, though he apparently knew very little about him. It's no wonder that morale at D.H.S. is reported to be low.

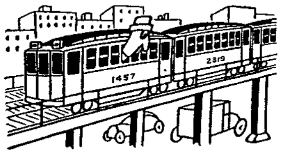
This, then, is the discouraged, disjointed beast that Michael Chertoff, barring unforeseen difficulties, will soon inherit. Chertoff was, by most accounts, a brilliant prosecutor. But his main experience on national-security issues came in the Ashcroft Justice Department, where he headed the criminal division for two years. He was a primary author of the U.S.A. Patriot Act, and a leader in the controversial prosecutions of John Walker Lindh and Zacarias Moussaoui. He was, moreover, a zealous proponent of the arrest of more than a thousand people, mostly Muslims, after September 11th—a roundup that resulted in widespread mistreatment of detainees but not a single terrorism-related charge.

The next Secretary of Homeland Security will need to be much tougher than Tom Ridge—capable of energizing the department, beating back its rivals, standing up to powerful industries, winning larger budgets, and, perhaps most important, making certain that our ideals won't be sacrificed in the overreaction that terrorism, by definition, seeks. Chertoff has little visible qualification for most of these tasks, and his record on the last is not promising. Reducing the vulnerabilities of our "critical infrastructure"—a whole world built without any thought as to how its components might be used to inflict death and destruction—is not, of course, the sole province of D.H.S. Neither is outsmarting terrorists. Still, Chertoff should be worried. "The United States is going through its own version of the Phony War," Stephen Flynn writes. The French and the British did not seriously prepare, when they had the time, for the new style of blitzkrieg warfare that Hitler had introduced in Eastern Europe. By May, 1940, when he invaded France, it was too late.

—*William Finnegan*

DEPT. OF PREDICTION

THREE TO FIVE



In the wake of a natural disaster or a major accident, there is an inevitable rush to dredge up parallels. After the recent Chambers Street subway fire—which destroyed a Depression-era control room integral to the dispatching of the Eighth Avenue A and C trains—Stan Fischler, the hockey commentator and the author of a half-dozen books about the subway, compared it to the Astor Place flood of 1956, in which fifty million gallons of hydrant runoff spilled into the Astor Place station and collapsed the track bed. Transit workers repaired the damage in less than a week. "That was one of the greatest comebacks in the history of the city's subway system," Fischler said last Tuesday. "They fixed it up in record time."

Tuesday's papers had carried the estimate of Lawrence Reuter, the Transit Authority president, that full train service would not return to the A and C lines for "three to five years." Riders were aghast. "We built the whole IND subway line in under five years," Mayor Bloomberg (an I.R.T. regular) protested, referring to the original Independent line, which now services Eighth Avenue. "We built the Empire State Building in one year." (There's an election coming, and you know what they say about making the trains run on time.) The tabloids pointed out that the George Washington Bridge had been built in just four years, the Titanic in three. Others, engaging in a kind of office parlor game, named some less obvious parallels. Three years: a law degree. Five years: a lion grows its mane. Three to five years: a plausible prison term for the former basketball star Jayson Williams, for shooting his chauffeur in the chest.

By the time the M.T.A. had backtracked, later in the day, claiming that the restoration process would take only six to nine months, a couple of West Side residents had begun compiling a list of other recent "three to five year" estimates. There appeared to be a pattern. In baseball, for instance, this is the amount of time often cited as necessary for turning around a losing team (other than the Mets), or for a new stadium name to enter the public consciousness. Apparently, it takes three to five years to train an air-traffic controller, earn a black belt in karate, or, if you're a salesman switching industries, to get comfortable with your new line of work. The same goes for stepkids adjusting to a "blended family." The rule applies to real estate, too: it typically takes you-know-how-long for the flaws in defective houses to reveal themselves.

The pattern, of course, is that these aren't so much estimates as default clichés, heavy on folk wisdom and light on deduction. Reuter insisted, late last week, that he "must have misspoke," but that, for what it's worth, it may yet take three to five years to finish rebuilding that control room, even after the trains are back up and running. But here's another possibility: "three to five years" has become a fixed entry on the psychological timeline, the progression from "just a second" to "two minutes" to "next week" and so on. It's what you might call a cognitive reference point, a shorthand expression representing a perception of time rather than a literal quantification of it. (The progression is logarithmic, because we recognize fewer and fewer distinctions—three to five years, a decade, a generation, a lifetime—as time extends beyond the present.) Viewed in this way, Reuter's initial estimate was not a calculation but an expression of magnitude: an attempt to explain that, as subterranean disasters go, the fire was a really big deal.

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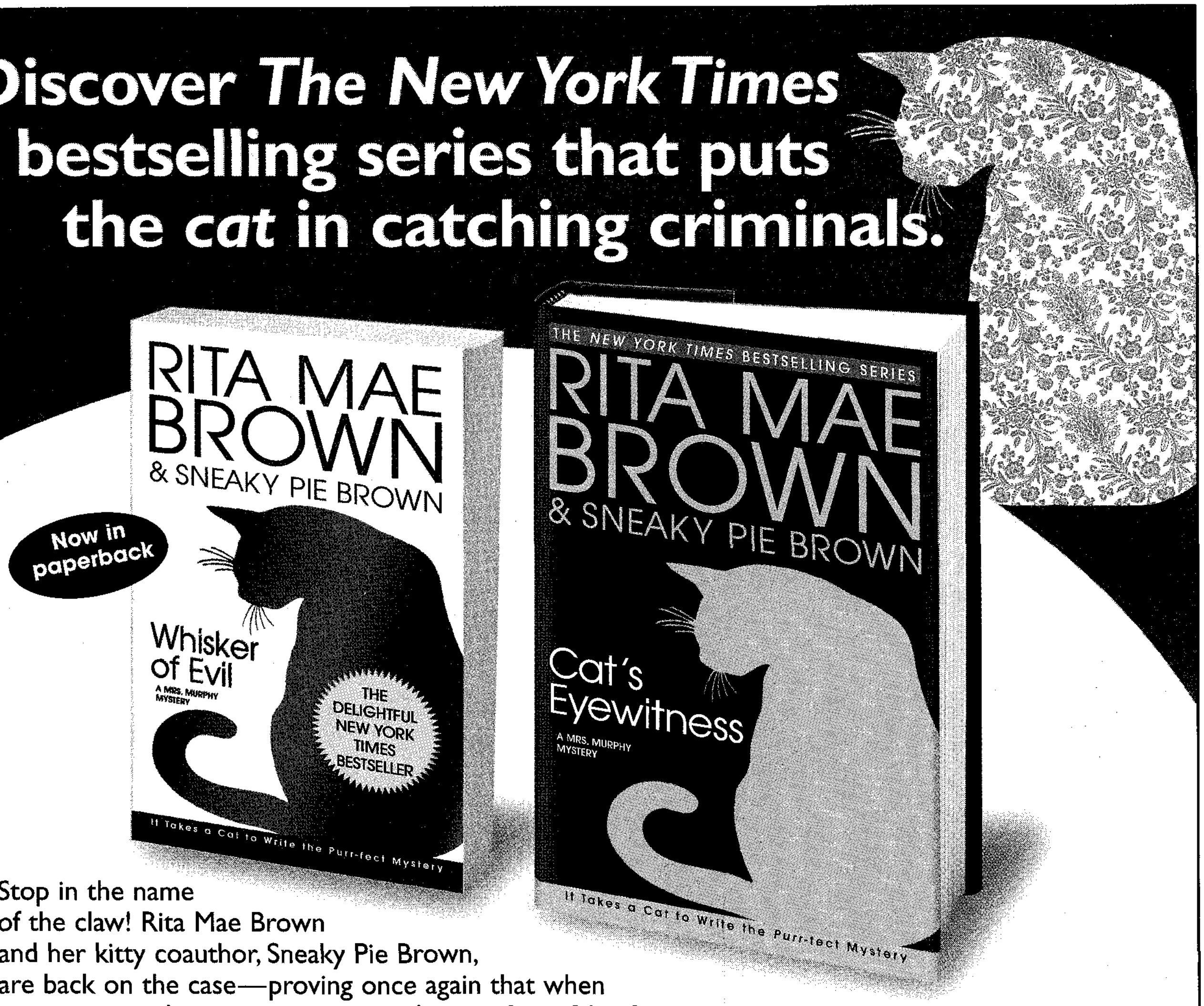
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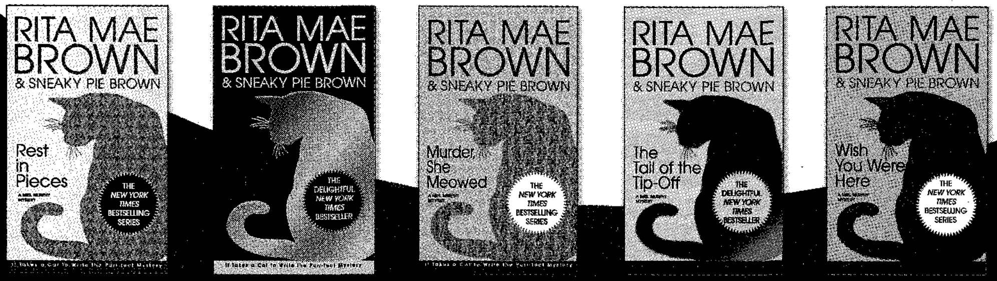
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1	2	3	4	■	5	6	7	8	■	9	10	11
12				■	13				■	14		
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55			■	56					■	57		

ACROSS

1. Critters for cats to chow on
5. Kibble carriers
9. "Murder, __ Meowed" (fifth in the Mrs. Murphy series)
12. __ vera, plant kept out of reach of cats
13. In __ of flowers...(seen in an obit)
14. Fun thing for feline
15. Indigestible ickies
17. Variant of street, for a black cat to cross (abbr.)
18. Tavener Heyward (hardworking horse guy in "Cat's Eyewitness"), et al.
19. Cat's eye color, perhaps
21. Also a supplement for pets, __-C
24. Chew on a bone
25. Copycat
26. Part of a killer's knife
29. City of Cats, in Italian
32. Way to sleuth for Mrs. Murphy
35. What one says at the tail of the evening
36. Exclaimed when Sneaky Pie was born, perhaps: "__ girl!"
37. "'__.' Harry flashed her crooked grin." (excerpt from Chapter 1 of "Claws and Effect")
38. When the cat's away, the mice will play = Give _ _ inch, and we'll take a nibble of your catnip.
40. Mrs. Murphy's feline suitor
42. Fidgety feline's feeling
44. Tigra, __/Vauxhall car
46. Q. "Cats, their babies, first letter P?" A. "__, __--you must be thinking of baby dogs."
47. Mountains of the cozy Crozet, Virginia, setting of Mrs. Murphy's mysteries
52. If a cat is older than eight . . . the nine, in "nine lives" then
53. Tidies the cat's bed, with It Out
54. Mail __, props for postmistress Mary Minor "Harry" Haristeen
55. Type, for short (Mrs. Murphy's is that of a gray tiger)
56. "__ in Pieces" (second in the Mrs. Murphy series)
57. Q. "How far along are you in 'Cat's Eyewitness'?" A. "_ _ to Chapter 14 and boy, is it good!"

DOWN

1. Cheerleading yell (Harry is part of the organizing committee for Crozet High's class of 1980 reunion in "Pawing Through the Past")
2. Bird-kill wing
3. Pewter the plump gray cat saying "you" in French
4. Be an officer in the Sheriff's Department like Deputy Cynthia Cooper
5. Variant of sheep's bleat or cry on a Crozet farm, say
6. Tabby's troubles
7. Pet toothpaste format
8. Best friend of Harry
9. "She suffered a ____. The coroner's report may reveal more information, though. We try not to jump to conclusions." (excerpt from "The Tail of the Tip-Off") . . . OR the result of a killer's knife
10. Excerpt from 9-Across: "Harry breathed deeply, conscious of her heart pounding. Jim Sanburne's midnight-blue Land Rover __ into view."
11. Spying sleuth
16. Cool cat's chapeau
20. __ Ravine Trail, mountain-biking trail in Virginia
21. Charlottesville, small city that's ten miles to the what of Crozet?
22. Sneaky Pie's collaborator/mother Rita Mae Brown discovered her at one, for short
23. Welsh corgi in the series
24. Remains "Wanted" = __ away with it
27. Knock off
28. Sleuth's suspicion, with Feeling
30. First in the series, "Wish You Were Here," is dedicated to the memory of Sally __
31. Corpse's complexion
33. "With two cats in the yard..." "Our House" band member
34. Murder mystery, for one
39. "Catch as Cat Can" character, Diego __
41. Suspect's story
42. "His eyebrows rose _ _ _. . ." (excerpt from Chapter 35 of 9-Across)
43. Ancient garb in 29-Across
44. Possessive pronoun used by Mrs. Murphy and Pewter and 23-Down
45. Flea to a feline
48. Cover up when questioned by a sleuth
49. Murderer's lighting preference
50. Wildebeest, big cat's feast
51. Second sight, for short

BANTAM MYSTERY CRUISE CONTEST RULES AND REGULATIONS

1. NO PURCHASE NECESSARY.

2. Contest starts January 31, 2005, 12:01 A.M. EST, and ends 11:59 P.M. EST, March 11, 2005. All contestants must be 18 years of age or older and a legal resident of the 50 United States or District of Columbia as of the date of entry.
3. Contestants may submit one (1) entry per person. All entries must be received by 11:59 P.M. EST, March 11, 2005. All submitted entries become the property of The Condé Nast Publications ("Sponsors") and will not be acknowledged or returned.
4. Contestants may enter the contest by completing and submitting via mail the Bantam Crossword Puzzle, a photocopy thereof found in the February 7, 2005 issue of *The New Yorker*, or a printable version available at www.NewYorkerReaderlink.com along with name, address, telephone in an envelope addressed to *The New Yorker* Promotion Department, 4 Times Square, New York, NY 10036. Sponsors are not responsible for entries that are late, lost, misdirected, postage due, illegible, incomplete, or mutilated. Sponsor in its sole discretion reserves the right to disqualify any person tampering with the entry process or otherwise in violation of the rules. Sponsor further reserves the right to cancel, terminate, or modify any promotion not capable of completion as planned. Sponsor may, at any time, change the prize to one of equal or greater monetary value.
5. Only entries that have all the correct answers will be eligible to win ("Eligible Entries"). One grand-prize winner will be selected at random from Eligible Entries received on or before March 14, 2005. All decisions of the judges are final and binding. The grand prize is a mystery cruise for two valued at approximately $3,000 depending upon exact itinerary. Cruise destination to be determined by Sponsor. Prize includes two cruise tickets for a 4-day/3-night mystery cruise, of which most meals, port taxes, and accommodations are included; roundtrip coach airfare for two; transportation to/from port of departure. All other expenses are the responsibility of the winner and guest. Income and other taxes, if any, are the sole responsibility of the winner. Winner will receive a written notification of the time, date, location, and other details about the cruise. If the winner is unable or unwilling to accept the mystery cruise as offered in the notification, sponsor reserves the right to disqualify the winner and select an alternate winner.
6. Subject to all federal, state, and local laws and regulations. Void outside of the 50 United States and District of Columbia, and where prohibited.
7. The odds of winning depend on the number of correct entries received. No substitution for prize except by Sponsor in which case a prize of equal or greater value will be substituted.
8. Employees of Condé Nast Publications and Random House ("Sponsors") and their immediate families are not eligible to enter.
9. Acceptance of prize constitutes consent to use the winner's name and likeness for editorial, advertising, and publicity purposes without further compensation, except where prohibited. The winner may be required to sign an Affidavit of Eligibility and winner and travel companion a Liability/Publicity release within 10 days of attempted date of notification or alternate winners may be chosen.
10. For the name of the winner, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to: "Bantam Crossword Puzzle Contest Winner List": *The New Yorker* Merchandising Department, 4 Times Square, 21st floor, New York, NY 10036 after March 14, 2005, but before May 1, 2005.

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Visit authors Rita Mae and Sneaky Pie Brown at www.ritamaebrown.org.

Much of the relevant literature regarding temporal forecasting and "duration estimation" has dealt with smaller quantities of time (e.g., a day or less). But an informal poll last week of cognitive psychologists and behavioral economists demonstrated some enthusiasm for, if not actual familiarity with, the "three to five" hypothesis. "The span of three to five years is frequently regarded as a natural arc of personal transformation," Mark Turner, of Case Western Reserve, said. George Lakoff, at Berkeley, added that the phenomenon of "subitizing," which refers to our ability to count objects in a split second, might also come into play. "Between three and five is where the human boundaries are," Lakoff said.

A number of academics also noted the "planning fallacy," which says that we're all overly optimistic when projecting how much we can accomplish, and how soon. In other words, six to nine months, the amended estimate, is a fool's bet.

And then there's always the cynical explanation. Stan Fischler said, "My wife's theory is that it was an M.T.A. ploy to get more dough."

—*Ben McGrath*

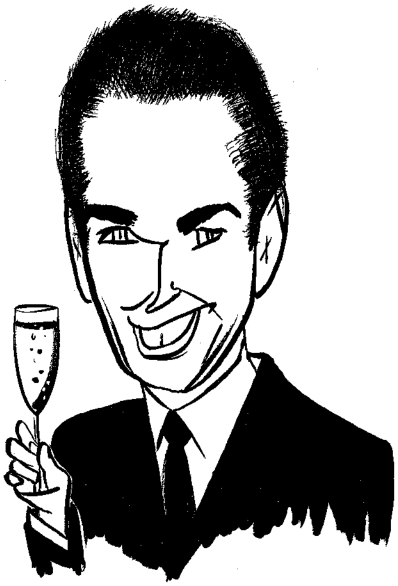
HAPPY RETURNS
KOONS AT FIFTY

Jeff Koons, the boy king of the art world, turned fifty the other day, and was given a surprise birthday party whose internal complexities and contradictions easily eclipsed the hoopla over Donald Trump's latest wedding. A hundred and fifty carefully chosen guests braved freezing weather to appear on time, between eight and eight-fifteen, at the warehouse-like Deitch Projects gallery, on Wooster Street, and you could tell right away that it was a major event because more than half the men were wearing neckties. Slides and film clips of Koons's life and work were projected on large screens. The giant, forty-foot-high "Puppy" coated in flowers, the basketballs immersed in water, the kitschy porcelain nude embracing the Pink Panther were interspersed with home movies of toddler Jeff at the beach and film clips of grownup Jeff in his studio, polishing one of his "Celebration" sculptures, whose endlessly delayed gestation nearly bankrupted Jeffrey Deitch and led to threatened lawsuits and savage in-fighting among several dealers, collectors, and museums. The day after the party, Deitch said, marvelling, "Isn't it amazing that there were all these people in the room who really hate each other?"

Justine Koons, Jeff's wife, had asked Deitch to organize the fête on remarkably short notice, and he had rounded up a group of high-profile co-hosts, who included Peter Brant, the publisher and collector, and his wife, Stephanie Seymour, the model. Deitch shook hands with his rival dealer Larry Gagosian, who stepped in two years ago to take over the still unfinished "Celebration" project, on which Deitch had spent seven years and several million dollars. Thomas Krens, the Guggenheim Museum's director, who had once pushed to present the "Celebration" series at the Guggenheim, as part of a Koons retrospective that never happened, showered his frosty benison upon one and all. Ileana Sonnabend was there in a wheelchair, making a rare public appearance. Koons left the Sonnabend gallery in 1992, when Ileana and her gallery director (and adopted son), Antonio Homem, balked at what struck them as the out-of-control costs of an earlier Koons mixed-media series, called "Made in Heaven," that documented the physical aspects of his relationship with his former wife, Ilona Staller, the Hungarian-born porn star known as La Cicciolina. He returned in 1997, but the truth is that today Koons, with his gargantuan ambitions and ruinous needs, is too big for any one gallery. His vision requires the faith and unlimited funds of many dealers, many collectors, and many museums.

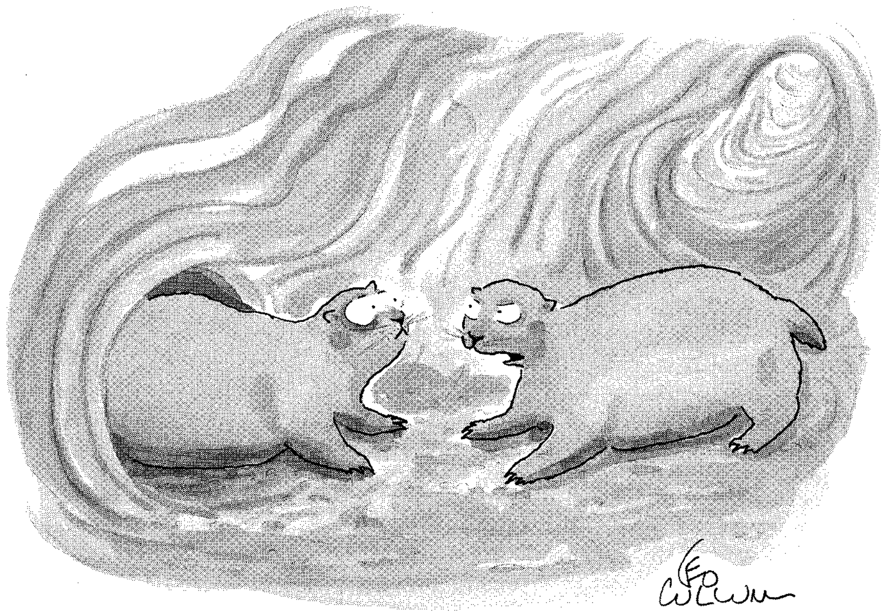
Other artists have generally liked and admired Koons, and Julian Schnabel, Brice Marden, David Salle, Richard Prince, George Condo, Francesco Clemente, Elyn Zimmerman, Cecily Brown, John Currin, and Elizabeth Peyton all showed up to celebrate him. The networking was wall to wall. Curators and museum directors worked the room, hobnobbing with real-estate pashas (and potential patrons) like Jerry Speyer and Larry Silverstein.

Promptly at eight-thirty, guests were urged to go to their assigned tables. The lights dimmed, and an amplified voice announced that Jeff was a block away. He came in smiling, with Justine and a few others, to cheers and applause. Was he surprised? Perhaps not. Dressed, as usual, in a dark suit and white shirt, he moved slowly through the crowd, shaking hands and reciprocating hugs. He clasped the downwardly extended hand of Tom Krens, who likes to say to Koons, "Jeff, you're a Guggenheim artist." He embraced his white-haired and vivacious mother, Gloria, who had flown up from the retirement home where she lives, in Sarasota, and he introduced her to the actor Willem Dafoe. "Jeff and I have known each other since we were twenty-two," Dafoe said. "We both came to New York the same year." Mrs. Koons was telling someone else that Jeff's kindergarten teacher had said that her son was very gifted in art but that it was important not to push him.



Jeff Koons

Dinner was served at nine-thirty. It featured tuna burgers, Koons's favorite food; the menu was printed on a replica of the card that Gloria and Henry Koons sent out to announce their son's worldly arrival, in 1955. A number of other family members were present, including Koons's twenty-nine-year-old daughter, Shannon, whom he didn't meet until 1995. (She was put up for adoption by her mother, who was a college student at the time.) Koons took the microphone and talked in his sincere voice about how much he loved his life and



"I saw my shadow. It made me look fat."

his family and all his friends, and how thrilled he was to have around him people who could say, about anything he wanted to make, "Jeff, let's do it." And then the garage doors opened, and in trooped the marching band of Burlington City High School, in Burlington, New Jersey, wearing navy-blue uniforms and feathered shakos and producing on their instruments a deafening version of "Happy Birthday." They were followed, a few minutes later, by a pair of white ponies pulling a cart with a three-tiered white cake, out of which popped a girl in a skimpy red bathing suit. Deitch had tried to get Jeff's friend Pamela Anderson for the cake duty, but she had to be at the Sundance Film Festival.

By this time, everyone was getting along. Julian Schnabel and David Salle, whose friendship went south years ago, were seen in an extended and amicable discourse. Michael Ovitz, who, in 1982, commissioned and paid for a sculpture that he says Koons never delivered, magnanimously refrained from kidding him about it. As for Deitch, he was pleased about the end of his four-year estrangement from Koons. "After all those problems with 'Celebration,' my respect for Jeff, and my belief in him as an artist, and our really deep friendship are all that remain," he said. "At the party, he told me I was his best friend."

—*Calvin Tomkins*

HOMECOMING DEPT.
FOLLOW THAT CAB

In 1996, after two seasons, HBO's "Taxicab Confessions," the mother of all reality television, was run out of New York City by a pettifogging official from the Taxi and Limousine Commission. Since then, the show's special taxi, which has no divider between the front and back seats and is outfitted with invisible cameras, has been prowling the clean streets of Las Vegas.

As an American totem, the taxi has always belonged more to the bustle of New York than to the anomie of Las Vegas. In its tenth year, which débuts on February 5th, "Taxicab Confessions" returns to the gritty hubbub of the New York night. The homecoming was carefully orchestrated by HBO's president of documentaries, Sheila Nevins, who saw an opportunity in the election of Michael Bloomberg as mayor, in 2001. Soon after Bloomberg's new commissioner of Film, Theatre, and Broadcasting, Katherine Oliver, came on board, in 2002, Nevins messengered over the Emmy she'd won in 1995 for "Taxicab Confessions." "I don't know you, you don't know me," Nevins wrote in an accompanying note. "But I'd like to win another of these and bring the show back to New York." Oliver sent back the Emmy, but she took up the challenge, which she says was "a no-brainer," adding that she had no trouble persuading the Mayor to welcome the show back. "He was thrilled to support it: it's about job creation and about capturing the New York experience."

Nevins is a handsome, nervy woman with frosty hair. She earned an M.F.A. in directing from the Yale School of Drama, and she created "Taxicab Confessions" after watching a tame pilot about people getting in and out of taxis during the day. "To me, the city gets hot and sticky and electric when the lights go out," she said. "I like night. I think night is wicked and exciting."

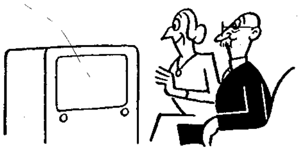
These days, as anyone who has recently hailed a yellow cab knows, it's hard to get a New York cabbie to listen to anything but his cell phone. "Taxicab Confessions" uses only licensed drivers, and they have to audition for the job. "They have to feel what the rider is saying," Nevins said. In the new edition of the show, we see people responding to life after September 11th. A woman tells her driver about a friend who survived being buried in the rubble of the Twin Towers. "I'm worried about him now—he was screaming with anger at me," she says, wiping away tears. Another passenger, a Latino man, brags about his devotion to his blond transsexual lover, who is seated beside him. And an obese young African-American woman serenades the effeminate white man she is taking home to bed for the first time. "One boy, one steady boy," she sings with feeling. The finale features two young women, "fired up," they say, after a night of karaoke, stripping off their bras and leaning out the cab windows to sing "I Will Survive."

"Yes, it's voyeuristic. Yes, it's lowbrow," Nevins said. "Every creation starts from a certain kind of voyeurism, whether you're listening to your head or listening in. I love to overhear conversations at other tables in restaurants, or to watch people go by in cars when they don't know you're looking. They're little epiphanies.

"After all," she went on, "does life make sense? No. So the only way you have any chance of learning anything about why you're here is by listening hard to how other people grapple with it. I think Shakespeare would have liked this show. He was a voyeur. He listened."

—*John Lahr*

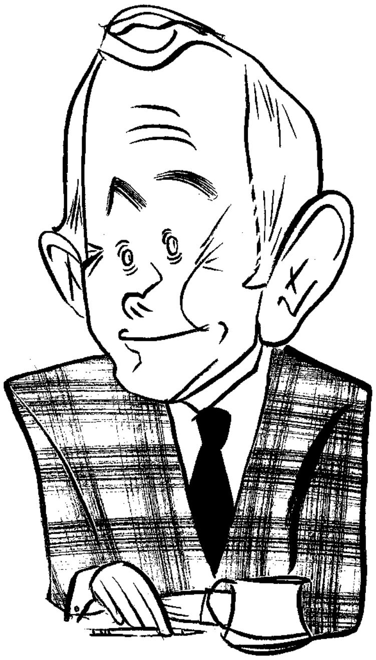
POSTSCRIPT
JOHNNY CARSON



How strange it was to learn, on a Sunday, that Johnny Carson had died. Strange that it *was* a Sunday—one of only two nights of the week that he had not owned. That day, we didn't even have Letterman or Leno to look forward to in the hope that they would say something trenchant and touching. They did issue statements, but, because they weren't there in person to deliver them, their words went no deeper than the quite good statement put out by President Bush, who didn't know Carson and doesn't owe his career to him. (We can only dream about the jokes that Carson might have made about Bush.) But that was fine. This time, our own thoughts were enough. If Johnny hadn't made our careers, he had, after all, made our nights, and almost thirteen years after he was gone from public view—and there has hardly been a figure in show business who was as gone as Carson was after he did his last show—we could still hear his voice and see his slow burns and double takes. His show, inevitably, had become cornier and less appealing to young people as it, and they, aged, and all those reruns in the later years were a drag, but, until the end, our pleasure in witnessing Carson's snap-to bearing, his perfect pauses, and his collapses into laughter, sometimes to the point of tears, stayed at full brim.

Carson aged remarkably well, in terms of both his looks and his well-stropped performing edge, and even when he retired, at sixty-seven, he made it possible for fans to maintain an image of him as being perpetually in the prime of his life. Not middle-aged; not that. Never *that.* But definitely an adult, and fixed in a certain time when adulthood was something to aspire to, not something to be avoided. (Or perhaps it was just that adulthood came knocking, regardless of your aspirations. In old home-movie footage shot by Carson's father which is included in a 1982 NBC special called "Johnny Goes Home," a sentimental journey back to Norfolk, Nebraska, Carson and six of his friends are shown smiling for the camera the day before they all headed off to military service, in 1943. They had just graduated from high school.)

Think of Carson and the picture that comes into focus is that of a debonair man in his mid-forties, in well-fitting sports jacket and tie and pressed slacks—the kind of dress that upper-middle-class men used to wear to dinner parties until the seventies, when there was at least a little formality at almost every occasion except a barbecue. He represented a world, and a time of day, that had nothing to do with children, and if you were quite young when you first watched him that made him even more glamorous and mysterious—much as adulthood itself was glamorous and mysterious. That the grownup life exemplified by Carson was in large part phony (one discovered upon reaching it), a construct of television entertainment itself, simply added to its desirability. If you found the actual sixties and seventies confusing and threatening, the sixties and seventies of "The Tonight Show" were both a balm and an upper. Carson made adulthood seem less laden with responsibility, more full of play and promise, than childhood.



Carson wasn't, as some people have said in the past week, the guy next door, unless the guy next door to you is much funnier and better-looking than you are, dresses better, makes a hundred times as much money, and still seems charismatic after you've known him for thirty years. Carson may have been in our homes—"He was the only other man in my bedroom," a woman said last week in an on-the-street TV interview—but it was really his home we were being invited into. He made us feel special—smart, funny, and welcome. When he was on, we were alone together. And who can resist a man who is both witty and a good listener?

The town in Iowa where Carson was born is sixteen miles north of a hamlet called Gravity—a geographic correlative to the way he hovered above the force field that eventually pulls down other entertainers, not to mention the rest of us. Like his fellow-Nebraskan Fred Astaire (Carson's family moved one state over when he was eight, and he is claimed as a native by both Cornhuskers and Hawkeyes), he cut a figure of supreme elegance. He made his partners—his guests—look good. Carson once said that he wished he could have persuaded Cary Grant (who, weirdly, died in Iowa) to appear on his show. Grant, like Carson, ended his career decisively, walking away from movies when he was sixty-two. Both stars fashioned unreal creations that would have melted unprettily in atmospheres other than the ones they were designed for—Grant's movie persona would have looked false on the TV screen, and the qualities that made Carson a perfect host didn't transfer to real life. (His one appearance on David Letterman's show, after his retirement, was a silent turn, lasting less than a minute. Brilliant.) But in his chosen field Carson turned his modesty and elusiveness into gold. On the Des Moines *Register* Web site's list of "Famous Iowans," Carson's "Tonight Show" career is summed up in a way that some would consider vulgar, but the simple words have the ring of a fairy tale about a wise king who has learned that generosity leads to wealth. The entry gives the date on which Carson began his run, and then it says, "He retained the late-night crown until he retired a rich man in 1992."

—*Nancy Franklin*

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LETTER FROM THE INDIAN OCEAN

MISSION TO SUMATRA

The marines of Expeditionary Strike Group Five take on the tsunami.

BY DAN BAUM

The United States military has a long and bitter history of being constrained by the countries that host its overseas military bases. Thailand in 1975 objected to U.S. Marines using Thai bases to stage their response to the seizing of the American freighter Mayagüez by the Khmer Rouge. Costa Rica in 1979 ejected a U.S. Air Force unit that was preparing to evacuate Americans from Nicaragua. And Spain and France in 1986 refused to let U.S. planes based in Britain fly over their territory on their way to bomb Libya. When the government of Turkey refused, in early 2003, to allow American forces to invade Iraq across the Turkish border, Pentagon planners got serious about freeing the United States from the sensitivities of allies. The technology already existed to resupply warships on the high seas. Reorganizing the Navy to do so as a matter of routine could mean never having to use foreign bases at all. As naval officers like to put it, "sea-basing" allows the United States to project its power anywhere in the world "without a permission slip." In the past two years, the Navy has also begun organizing what it calls Expeditionary Strike Groups—small fleets built around amphibious assault ships stuffed with marines and helicopters. The Navy has four such groups afloat now; it plans to have more patrolling international waters—"like a cop on the beat"—ready on a few days' notice not only to put marines ashore anywhere in the world but to support them for as long as they need to be there. Sea Power 21, the Navy's broad plan to respond to the post-9/11 era of small wars and uncertain alliances, is a military policy for a day when America might find itself without allies.

Rear Admiral Christopher Ames, the commander of Expeditionary Strike Group Five, learned about the Asian tsunami on December 26th the way most of us did: from television. He and his strike group—seven Navy and Coast Guard ships plus a submarine, carrying among them more than two thousand marines—had just left their home port of San Diego for a six-month deployment. The group was a couple of days from Guam, where it was scheduled to stop before heading for the Persian Gulf. The group's marines were the closest to the disaster scene, so, in anticipation of an order, Ames told his officers to begin planning to provide help to tsunami victims. "I had a feeling," he told me, as we talked in his cramped stateroom aboard the U.S.S. Bonhomme Richard.

Ames is no crusty old salt; at fifty, he has an eager, open manner that seems more executive than warrior, and a master's degree in public administration from Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. The formal order came by classified e-mail on December 28th to stop at Guam for supplies and then "proceed at best speed" to Sri Lanka. "'Proceed at best speed' aren't words you often hear," Ames said. "We're very fuel conscious. An order like that is not given without considerable forethought." A few days later, the group was redirected to Banda Aceh, in Sumatra, the city closest to the earthquake's epicenter. As they pulled into Guam, trucks loaded with humanitarian supplies were lined up on the docks "as far as you could see," Ames said. He sent a party to the Ace hardware store near the port to buy just about everything in stock—shovels, lumber, hammers, nails—and within ten hours the group was under way again.

Expeditionary Strike Group Five was in many ways the perfect response to the tsunami. No other agency responding to the disaster had anywhere near its capabilities. The Bonhomme Richard alone would have been a godsend to the people of Sumatra. Commissioned in 1998 and named for John Paul Jones's privateer, she was designed to be the Marine Corps's dream boat. Her entire stern opens to release the high-speed air-cushion landing craft necessary for the Marines' rare but signature beach assaults. From the outside,

The Bonhomme Richard's work also served to demonstrate the Navy's new "sea-basing" doctrine. Photograph by Benjamin Lowy.

CORBIS

she resembles a small aircraft carrier, though she lacks the catapult for throwing planes into the air. Instead, her flight deck is given over to six vertical-lift Harrier jump jets as well as a wide selection of helicopters, big and small. In addition to being a seaborne platform from which to launch land assaults, the ship could serve as a floating emergency room and thus free the Marines of having to treat their wounded in rudimentary and vulnerable field hospitals. Immediately off the flight deck are three large triage rooms equipped with X-ray readers, oxygen tanks, a decontamination chamber, and other medical equipment; a large elevator descends from here to the hospital belowdecks. Off to the side hangs a discreet blue curtain, behind which wait twelve stainless-steel morgue drawers. For such a large ship, the Bonhomme Richard draws shallow—only twenty-six feet—so she can move close to shore. The Bonhomme Richard and the other ships in Expeditionary Strike Group Five were carrying twenty-two helicopters; five landing craft, each with a sixty-ton capacity; desalinators capable of making unlimited quantities of fresh water; and forty high-riding seven-ton trucks to master the island's ruined coastal roads. The ships carried backhoes, bulldozers, generators, portable floodlights, and twenty-two hundred marines to rebuild bridges, treat the injured, restore electricity, and provide plenty of healthy young muscle. As the ships approached Indonesian waters, Ames told a reporter on board that he looked forward to putting "boots on the ground."

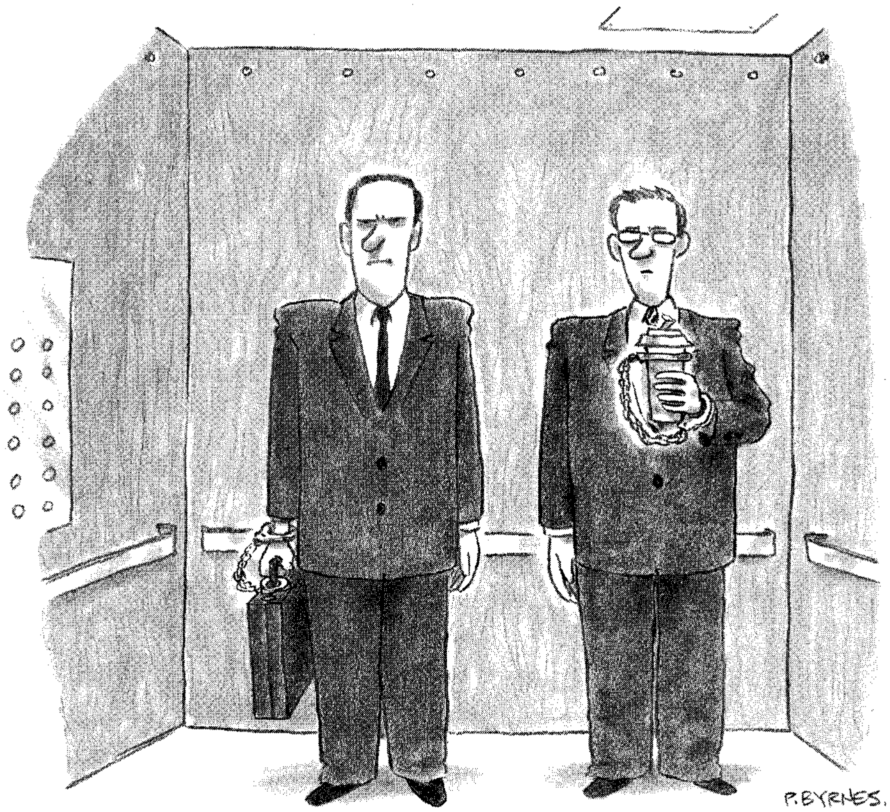
It didn't work out that way. As the American ships approached the Sumatran coast, they received word that the Indonesians wanted few, if any, Marine boots on the ground. Nobody gave reasons for this, but the Marines, bobbing in calm waters almost within earshot of shore, could imagine. Relations between the U.S. and Indonesia have been cooling since the nineteen-nineties, when the U.S. began curbing prodigious arms sales to the government in protest of human-rights abuses in East Timor. Aceh Province is home to a separatist movement that the Indonesian Army has been trying, sometimes brutally, to quell. (Before the tsunami, the province was largely off limits to foreigners.) The Indonesians, having shaken off, in 1949, three centuries of Dutch rule, did not, in any case, want to appear dependent on foreign powers in responding to the tsunami. Indonesia is home to the largest Muslim population in the world, and in light of the Iraq war it wouldn't do to have swarms of marines charging ashore. So here sat the marines, waiting for their permission slip and itching to get to the beaches.

I reached the Bonhomme Richard by helicopter on January 8th. The next day, a huge boxy supply ship, the U.S.N.S. Concord, arrived from Singapore and drew alongside. The Bonhomme Richard's helicopters roared off the deck and buzzed around the Concord like flies; in several hours of feverish and noisy activity, they moved tons of rice, water, and other goods into the Bonhomme Richard's hold—the kind of oceangoing resupply, independent of a host nation, envisioned by Sea Power 21. "The heroes are the logisticians," Ames told me. "Within two weeks of the tsunami, they put out bids to venders, got the bids, cut the checks, told them where to deliver, collected the goods, flew them to Singapore, loaded them onto ships, figured out where we'd be, and met us out here in the middle of the ocean." He paused while the ship's chaplain came on the intercom with the evening prayer, I Samuel 30:24, which the chaplain artfully interpreted: "For as his share is who goes down into the battle, so shall his share be who stays by the supplies: they shall share alike."

Inactivity is hard on marines. Those on the Bonhomme Richard milled around the ship's narrow steel halls, hung out in the enlisted mess watching Fox News and war movies on a big-screen TV, cleaned and recleaned their weapons, and got on one another's nerves. "It's frustrating—we're good to go," Sergeant Arthur Anthony said. Sea duty is uncomfortable. The enlisted mess is vast, low-ceilinged, and as chaotic as a high-school cafeteria, with lots of shouting and grab-ass. The din is maddening, and the air suffused with a heavy, rank odor, like steam-table water left too long. Unlike officers, who eat off crockery, enlisted sailors and marines are served on sectional plastic trays. Their salad bar is more extensive than the officers', but otherwise their food is worse—garlic bread made of hot-dog rolls, thick squares of pizza beribboned with orange cheese, soggy spaghetti. A lance corporal said it made him pine for a Jäger Bomb—the herbal liqueur Jägermeister mixed with Red Bull.

An aircraft carrier is often compared to a floating city, but, with its stale air, the incessant clang of heavy steel doors, and pasty-faced men in coveralls threading poorly lit corridors, it feels more like a floating prison. Nobody is allowed on the flight deck without good reason, so the only glimpse of the outdoors that most sailors and marines get is from a vast hangar bay one deck down, and only when the huge elevator hatches—through which aircraft are pushed onto moving platforms—are left open to the sea. Many crew members on the Bonhomme Richard see as little of the sun as they would if they were serving on a submarine. Off-duty officers wanting a moment's peace can sit in the wardroom, which, though not luxurious, is at least quiet, but the enlisted people's only refuge from noise and commotion is their bunk, or "rack"—a slot in a stack of beds ten feet high, with the bunk above so close that it's impossible to read in bed. It's a tribute to the allure of the services that so many marines reënlist. Their discomfort helps explain why they're in such magnificent physical condition: they burn off bottled-up energy by working out endlessly in the ship's stuffy but well-equipped gym. As I was passing through one evening, three marines with superhero physiques were watching American Forces Network News while running on treadmills. The lawyer for Army Specialist Charles Graner, who was on trial for abusing prisoners at Abu Ghraib, was telling the camera that forcing prisoners to make a pyramid with their bodies isn't abuse, because American cheerleaders make pyramids all the time. "They're not wasting too much time defending this guy if they got him a lawyer that dumb," one of the treadmilling marines said. "You're going to Leavenworth, dude."

People's lives were at stake in Sumatra, but everybody on the Bonhomme Richard, down to the newest private, seemed aware that something else hung in the balance as well. The United States had a rare opportunity to make a grand gesture of friendship to the Islamic world at a time when many Muslims were viewing the war in Iraq, and the broader war on terror, as a cover for a war on Islam. Marines tend to be idealistic. They believe that the United States is righteous, and those on the Bonhomme Richard were genuinely eager to get out there and prove it. The Navy, too, had something to prove—that, in an era of small infantry wars, a big blue-water force remains relevant. A few months ago, a retired two-star Army general named Robert Scales, a former commandant of the Army War College, summarized a view often heard from the men in green. He told me, "They haven't fought a blue-water sea battle since Leyte Gulf," in 1944. "If you believe, as I do, that the wars of the conceivable future are going to look like Iraq, why do we have so many men, and so much money, floating around the ocean?" When I repeated this to Admiral Ames, he sighed as though he'd heard it too often. The tsunami-relief effort was, for Ames and his branch, a chance to answer that question. "We've talked about this idea of sea-basing for several years, of being able to project power anywhere in the world without asking permission," he said. "What we're doing here validates the beauty of it."



The ship woke on January 10th to the news that the Marines were finally going ashore in force. What's more, they were going in the miraculous vehicle that has replaced the landing craft of yore: the Landing Craft Air Cushion, or LCAC (pronounced "EL-kack"). The LCAC is essentially a gigantic everglades boat, a platform eighty-eight feet long and forty-four feet wide that rides on an inflatable rubber skirt, with two twelve-foot fans on the back for propulsion. It can transport a tank, or a hundred marines, or twelve Humvees across the waves at more than forty-five m.p.h. and zoom up onto the sand. The Marines haven't made a landing under significant fire since Inchon, in 1950, but hitting the beach lies at the core of their mythology. They train for it endlessly, and organize their Expeditionary Units around the Battalion Landing Team. As they tell it, only the Marines can execute this dashing, dangerous maneuver today; it's what sets them apart.

The Marines differentiate themselves from the Army in other ways, too. They were the first to adopt strange, digital-camouflage uniforms dotted with tiny, pixillated squares that make the men and women wearing them look like icons in a video game. Unlike soldiers, marines don't wear unit patches or awards on their uniforms. "It's nobody's business," one landing-team major told me. "The first thing we do when we kill an enemy soldier, if we're fighting a uniformed enemy, is to go up to the body and read his patches. You can learn a lot—what units you're up against, what their qualifications are—and then you know how well fed and equipped those units are. I even take off my rank in combat. My marines know who I am." The Marine ethic also dictates that every marine is a rifleman; even cooks and typists are trained and ready to go into combat at a moment's notice, their rifles always nearby.

But the order on January 10th was "No weapons." The Indonesians were finally letting the marines come ashore, but they had to come unarmed. The marines were appalled. "Man, I'll bet this island is crawling with folks who'd love to kill a marine if they could get the chance," one lance corporal said. A ripple of hope went through the ship when Fox News reported that shots had been fired in Banda Aceh, perhaps by the rebels who have been trying for a quarter of a century to gain independence from Indonesia. Then an American helicopter rolled over in a rice paddy, leaving its injured crew momentarily stranded, and the Marine pilots on the Bonhomme Richard began carrying sidearms—though with the magazines removed. Major Robert Salasko, who is thirty-six, and is known as Bubba, sat down on January 10th for a breakfast of six hard-boiled eggs and a sweet roll, as the loudspeaker announced a random drug screening ("Urinalysis now being held in ship's brig and will secure at sixteen hundred"). "Going ashore," Salasko boomed happily to Major Keith Parry. Gloomily stirring his Cream of Wheat, Major Parry, who commands an élite combat team but had orders to stay aboard and check helicopter manifests, mumbled, "Don't shoot anybody." Salasko responded, "Can't take my weapon." He patted the sides of his close-cropped cranium. "Except this."

"That's a hindrance," Parry said.

"You're jealous."

"Got that right."

No aspect of the beach landing was left to chance. "What I'm going to do is this," the strike group's public-affairs officer, Lieutenant Billy Ray Davis, told an Associated Press television crew. "I'm going to have the LCAC back out of the ship with a helicopter overhead." He held his hands out, palms down, to show their relative positions. "Then I'm going to have you in another helicopter up here"—he raised one hand to shoulder height—"so you can get the helicopter, the LCAC, and the ship all in one shot." He turned to a Fox News cameraman. "There are two extra seats in the pilot house. You and the A.P. reporter have them."

We passed through the cavernous hangar deck to get to the LCAC. Sailors and marines were scooting about in forklifts to an exquisitely mixed soundtrack of helicopter engines, beep-beeps of backing vehicles, shouts, *ah-ooo-gah* klaxons, and loudspeaker announcements. Everywhere stood pallets loaded with Gitangkim rice from Thailand, Ice Cool bottled water from Malaysia, and U.S.-bagged rice labelled "Whole Grain White Rice, Origin: Vietnam."

When Marine infantry go ashore in the LCAC, they're seated in windowless steel compartments, not al fresco with sea spray in their faces, because anybody on deck could be sucked into the giant fans. The twelve-nautical-mile trip to shore took about fifteen minutes; when we emerged from the compartment, we faced a phalanx of cameramen and photographers who had been helicoptered to shore ahead of us and, behind them, Meulaboh, an utterly destroyed town that had recently been home to thousands of people and a small Indonesian Army base. The Singaporean Army was running relief

The New Yorker, Nov. 12, 1927
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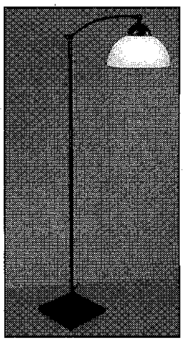

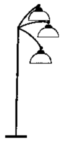

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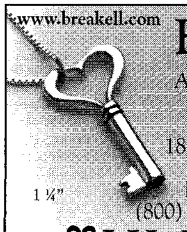

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here—its biggest foreign-aid deployment ever—and its smartly dressed soldiers stood in a semicircle behind the photographers. The noise was intense; three helicopters, with a television cameraman or a still photographer in the door of each, circled above. The Army base and the town behind it were a disaster-scape of mud-smeared, ruined concrete buildings, uprooted trees, overturned cars, beached boats, sheared-off roofs, and vast jumbles of timber, rubbish, and rubble. People picked through the wreckage or just sat, staring. From the skeletons of a few surviving houses, we could see that the wave had been about one story high here, and fierce enough to tear huge holes in the strongest of the town's concrete walls. Marine Colonel Thomas Greenwood, the commander of the strike group's marines, stepped off the LCAC with Navy Captain Michelle Howard, the commodore of the three amphibious vessels in the group. They turned, walked back onto the LCAC, and stepped off it again. Photographers pressed in around them. Beyond the beach and across a broad trench of water and mud, a small group of Indonesian soldiers and civilians watched. A massive forklift, brought ashore on the LCAC, began unloading onto the debris-strewn beach what was said to be sixty-four thousand pounds of rice and bottled water. Three trips by the ship's big helicopters could have brought the same quantity of supplies to a dry spot inland, where the Indonesians' small trucks could have reached them, so when a Singaporean military officer walked by I asked why the Americans hadn't done that instead. “I have the same question, because this is waterlogged,” he said. He waved a hand at the large flooded area beyond the beach. “The trucks can't get through.”

Colonel Greenwood marched past, shaking hands. “I wish you'd been here earlier,” he shouted to me above the roar of the helicopters. “We helo'ed in French medical supplies, and you had Frenchmen and Americans working together, happy—well, not happy, because of the circumstances, but working together!” He was called away, and Commodore Howard stepped up to shake hands and introduce herself. “Michelle,” she said, pumping my hand. Howard, an African-American woman of high rank in a service that has not always been easy for women, is short and powerfully built, palpably smart and dynamic, with prominent, highly animated features. She was wearing blotchy desert fatigues and a flat, soft-brimmed boonie hat. “We have a stovepipe vision of what we can do, but we'd spoken with the Singaporeans first,” she said, enunciating with exaggerated clarity and gesturing broadly with her arms. “The Singaporeans have very good relations with the Indonesians, and their advice was”—here she executed a funky body ripple, bobbing her head and pushing down with her palms—“go slow.”

The torpid sky tore open, as it had been threatening to do all day, drenching us in a sudden downpour. Howard didn't register the rain. “In the Navy, we command by negation. I communicate up what I want to do, and my superiors say, ‘Yeah,’ ‘Yeah,’ ‘Yeah,’ ‘Stop!’ ” She spoke emphatically of coöperation and respect. “I will tell you this,” she said as rain poured off the brim of her hat. “Everybody down to the lance corporal understood that this is a Muslim country, and you should have seen them going through the M.R.E.s”—meals ready to eat—“pulling out all the ones with pork in them.” Finally, we walked back to the LCAC and got out of the rain. This time, I sat in the pilot house. As we backed into the surf, I looked upon sixty-four thousand pounds of rice and bottled water resting on the beach.

The next evening, I asked Colonel Greenwood, as we sat in his windowless stateroom, if he'd specifically negotiated permission to use the LCAC so that the Marines could have a televised beach-hitting event. He chuckled and waved away the question. Then he said, “There are four words we use every day with Colonel Geerhan,” the Indonesian commander at Meulaboh. “ ‘How. Can. We. Help.’ I don't say, ‘Why don't you use my trucks?’ If I did that, I'd be putting him on the defensive. The Indonesians definitely want to control the size of the footprint. It's mutually understood, for example, that everybody goes home at night. If my marines live in what's left of the town, it's a burden to the infrastructure.” Also, he said, the Indonesians “don't want to feel like a charity case.”

On his coffee table was a copy of *Foreign Affairs* and several issues of Harvard's alumni magazine. Greenwood, at forty-nine, has a folksy air but a sterling pedigree—including stints at the Kennedy School and the National Security Council—and a chestful of medals that he wasn't wearing. He again recounted the incident on shore with the Frenchmen, as though France and the United States had recently been at war, and he emphasized his respect for the sensibilities of the Indonesians. “The only time Colonel Geerhan specifically said no was when we were going to bring ashore a ten-man working party yesterday,” he said. “The word we got back was, That might be excessive. It wasn't that they dislike Americans or marines. The nuance was, If you can do it with less people, we'd appreciate it.” He said the notion that the Marines always have to be in charge is a stereotype that he hopes this operation will dispel. “I think the biggest challenge is figuring out how to be useful in a way that doesn't, in the long term, alienate people,” he said. “It's easy to come into a place and think you have all the answers.”

I asked if the same could be said of Iraq, which was, unofficially, this ship's likely next stop. “We haven't always been good at expeditionary intelligence, that's true,” he said. He pulled out a Smart Card, a folding laminated pocket card for marines to carry in Iraq, covered with transliterated Arabic phrases (“Can you get us out of here safely?”), communications tips (“Quick upward head snap with tongue click means no”), and thumbnail cultural sketches of Arabs, both Shia and Sunni, Kurds, Assyrians, Chaldeans, and Turkoman (“As a religious and ethnic minority, the Chaldeans distrust both Kurdish and Arab intentions. They have peaceful relations with Turkoman”). “Ten, fifteen years ago, we wouldn't have had this,” Greenwood said of the Iraq Culture Smart Card. “The Marines have learned the hard way. We continue learning.”

The marines of Expeditionary Strike Group Five had no firm orders directing them to Iraq; they were merely slated to pass from Pacific Command to Central Command, or CENTCOM, which oversees the Iraq war. Most of the marines I spoke to, though, believed that with the

BLACK VALENTINE

Passing through the Gates of Life
I heard the secrets women whisper
Only to women: the rhythms of
His winter-long depressions, manic springs—
Drawn shades, bleeding blue willowware plates,
The hidden photo of his father, a darkly debonair mustachioed
Russian shoemaker
Angrily hammering nails along the Androscoggin,
The dented silver hairbrush he never let her touch.
With my sister she unties the love knot—a suicide note
In a locked box, confesses the rape
In the North End stairwell when she was eight,
While with me she recalls again and again
The unlikely miracle of my birth,
How I rose that December morning from her once-shattered pelvis,
"A blue-eyed Dresden doll."

—*L. S. Asekoff*

war going as it is they would be called in. On my way to Indonesia, in Thailand, I'd met Marine Lance Corporal Joel Abshier, a young man who, as soon as we were introduced, told me, "I'm eager to get to Iraq, sir! That's where the fight is." He went on, "I mean it. Nobody joins the Marines for the college money. You join the Army for college money. You join the Marines because you want to fight wars." On the Bonhomme Richard, though, I found the marines more reflective, perhaps because many of them were veterans of the war's initial, or "kinetic" phase, which ended with the declaration "Mission accomplished." (The Marines now refer to that phase as Operation Iraqi Freedom I, or O.I.F. I. The messy insurgency that followed, which some of the Bonhomme Richard marines also participated in, is called O.I.F. II. Some are even starting to talk about O.I.F. III, the intensely violent period surrounding the elections.)

Lance Corporal Jeremy Harris, who is twenty-three, was a breacher in Iraq; he opened doors in the towns that his unit passed through, sometimes with a sledgehammer, sometimes with a shotgun blast, sometimes with C-4 explosives. He was scared every time, he said, and described his attitude about his return trip the way many marines did. "No, I don't want to go back, fuck no," he said. "But nobody made me sign up. It's what I have to do so that other people don't have to. I'm ready."

On the morning of my last full day aboard the Bonhomme Richard, I stopped in a helicopter-maintenance office to say goodbye to some sailors I'd met and then hurried up to the organized chaos of the flight deck, where, for all the geopolitics involved, it was undeniably touching to see kids from the Midwest sweating and heaving big sacks of rice to help Asian fishing communities that they'd very likely never heard of before. I was put aboard a CH-46, a banana-shaped helicopter that was a mainstay during Vietnam; this one, in fact, had a little brass plate saying that it entered service in 1969—well before either of its pilots was born. The crew chief, Marine Corporal Eric Hutchinson, a strapping, ruddy twenty-two-year-old from outside Portland, Oregon, was wearing an unloaded pistol with the clip in his pocket. "You remember 'Apocalypse Now,' when the woman throws a grenade into the helicopter?" he shouted over the engines as he strapped me in. "I'm not down with that."

Hutchinson was eager to set me up with an audio helmet: I could hear the pilots talking to each other and then, suddenly, an electric guitar—Linkin Park's "Nobody's Listening." Grinning, Hutchinson gave me a thumbs-up and waggled his iPod at me, dancing in place as the helicopter leaped upward. At our feet was a box full of elfin parachutes from which dangled rolls of Life Savers. The flight-equipment crew, which takes care of life jackets and crash helmets, had made them during their off hours to drop over ruined villages to cheer up children. We flew fifty feet above the water at about a hundred and fifty m.p.h., watching the water color change from sapphire to jade to egg cream to egg cream churned up with bits of wood, cloth, root balls, overturned boats, and paper. It had been two weeks since the tsunami, and the bodies appeared to have sunk, been fished out, or carried out to sea. We skimmed over coastal mudflats, which extended inland about half a mile. But they weren't mudflats. Faint squares showed through the slime—the fleeting footprints of houses. As the angle changed, the ghosts of streets faded in and out of view. This had been a town. Here and there were the remains of a concrete building, shattered into pieces the size of dinner plates and strewn inland. Regiments of oil palms lay identically on their sides. All this destruction had happened in minutes on the morning of December 26th.

We flew for about fifteen minutes and set down at a tiny airfield in the middle of a jungle, well inland from the destruction, where a group of Indonesian soldiers and civilians waited. The people who lived along Sumatra's coast had never been long on cash and the things cash buys, but with fish and rice abundant neither had they been desperately poor. The soldiers seemed well enough cared for, but the civilians, grimacing against our noise and rotor wash, were destitute—frighteningly thin, traumatized, their clothes ragged and filthy. We made a bucket brigade to hand out the rice, then each of us Americans shook hands with each of the Indonesians, soldier and civilian alike. They touched their hearts and pressed their hands together. We had camcorders; they had camcorders. We filmed them and they filmed us. As we lifted off and swung back toward the ship for another load, Guns N' Roses came on the headset, singing "Knockin' on Heaven's Door." One advantage to listening to rock and roll on a Marine helicopter is that you can sing along as loud as you like. ♦

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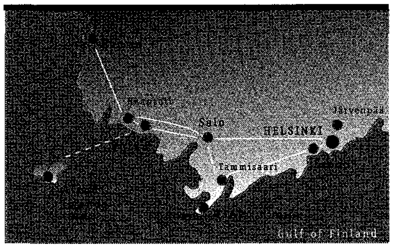

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PRINCE HARRY: THE ROYAL EXCERPTS

BY PAUL RUDNICK

Since all of that fuss regarding my wearing a swastika armband at a recent costume affair, I've decided to keep this sensitivity journal, charting my increasing awareness of the feelings of others, especially those of different races, religions, and smells. Why, just last week I attended a synagogue service, where I wore a little crocheted tea cozy on my head and, during the prayers, I tried to sound like I was continually clearing my throat. I've also been watching reruns of "Seinfeld," a television program that features a Jewish comedian, who seems quite amusing, particularly as he cavorts with other Jews. And, to atone for my much publicized and disgraceful ignorance, on Monday I approached a Jewish schoolmate and announced, "So you're a Jew. I'm so sorry."

On Tuesday I explored people of color. Just by peering out of my palace window, I glimpsed so many wonderfully varying tonalities, rather like paint chips. And I pondered: Wouldn't it be marvellous, and an ideal illustration of brotherhood, if we could just line up everyone in the world by gradation, with the English people right at the front? Immigration is simply a matter of every nation assembling a complete box of human crayons, and never forgetting even those shades which no one ever uses, not if it's a picture of a bright sunny day.

I'm becoming even bolder in my quest for communion, so on Wednesday I sought out male homosexuals, not limited to those in my immediate family. I've heard that homosexuals often enjoy cultural pursuits, so I lingered in the men's loo at one of our popular West End musicals, hoping for an informative chat. Everyone there was remarkably friendly, even offering home phone numbers and constant references to my grandmum. Feeling refreshingly comfortable, I told one snappily dressed fellow, "I don't care what anyone says, I don't find you morally repellent. Perhaps if I got to know you better." Later I was quiveringly excited to come upon a lesbian, but when I questioned her Camilla replied, "That's still not funny, Harry."

I want my sensitivity to attain a sweepingly international scope, so I've been travelling in disguise these past few days, hoping to befriend Americans. To prove our kinship, I wore a great mound of padding and spoke very loudly. I immediately experienced a true bond with Yanks everywhere; I felt that we shared so much more than merely the gleeful bombardment of Muslim lands. I practiced yodelling "Hi!," "Howdy!," and "Does that come in extra large?," all phrases useful at both shops and bistros. I eventually mingled with a band of Texans outside Big Ben, who were asking their guide, "So which Prince is the moron?" As we chortled together, all I could think was: Poor Andrew.

I'm still working on the Chinese, or is it the Japanese? Whenever I approach them with my jovial martial-arts kicks, they all roll their eyes, or as much as they can.

I most especially wish to truly understand and appreciate women, and not simply as back-alley mistresses. I've made a concerted effort to treat females not as sexual prey but as utter equals. In keeping with this idea, I've begun regaling various young ladies with the very same questions I ask of my male chums, such as "Do you think those are real?," "Does that one seem drunk yet?," and "Would it be cricket for me to shag Fergie, now that she's thin?" I've learned that equality simply feels so much better and that's why, at my next costume bash, I'm going to appear as a proud Jamaican wet nurse. ♦

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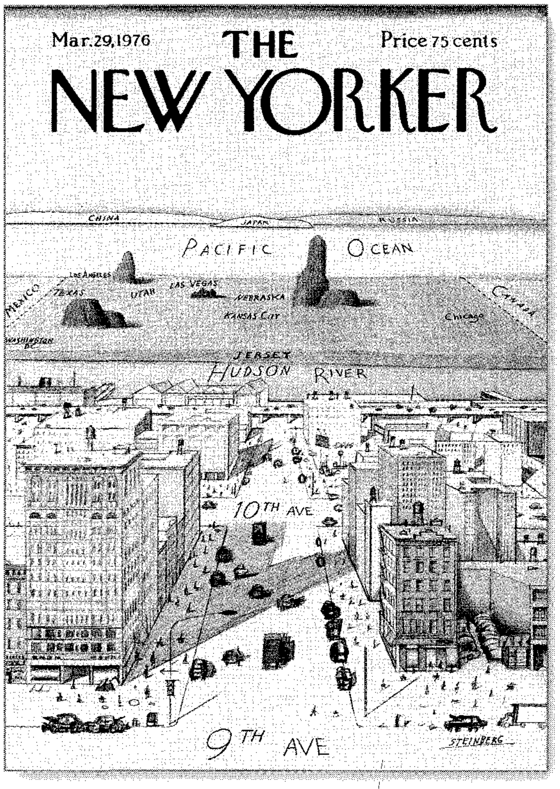
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ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

THE CLEVELANDERS

Can an orchestra survive its city?

BY CHARLES MICHENER

Franz Welser-Möst rehearsing the Cleveland Orchestra. Photograph by Steve Pyke.

The home of the Cleveland Orchestra—Severance Hall—may be the most beautiful symphony hall in America, thanks to a bridal gown. In 1928, a local oil magnate, John Long Severance, and his wife, Elisabeth, pledged a million dollars toward the construction of a new music center. Elisabeth Severance died unexpectedly, and Severance instructed local craftsmen to copy the leafy pattern of his wife's wedding dress for the ceiling of the auditorium. When the hall was restored, seventy years later, the renovators extended the tracery of the dress to a new acoustical shell that encloses the orchestra behind a silvery proscenium arch.

The characteristic sound of a symphony orchestra is shaped by its hall, and the acoustics of Severance have a clean, evenly spread vibrancy that promotes the extraordinary precision, transparency, and balance among the sections for which the Cleveland is famous. The Severance auditorium, which has a seating capacity of twenty-one hundred, is the most intimate of America's great symphony halls. The walls have no right angles, and the stage bellies out, as if to lock the audience in an embrace.

In January of last year, a concert conducted by Pierre Boulez, whose crisp, understated style is much favored by the orchestra, demonstrated the Cleveland players' uncanny powers of collaboration. The highlight was "Concertate il Suono," a specially commissioned piece by the young French composer Marc-André Dalbavie. Audaciously, it required the orchestra to be split up into four groups—the largest on the stage, the others in side boxes and toward the rear of the balcony. What began as quiet, simple scales, like a child warming up, soon became a wraparound tapestry of sound—a hundred musicians humming along with such apparently telepathic awareness of one another that they seemed to be inside the same skin. With any other orchestra, the struggle to keep everything from falling apart would have been palpable. For the Clevelanders, it seemed as effortless as breathing.

Before the concert, Boulez was in his dressing room, glancing through the score's beehive of notes with the look of a man enjoying his morning *Le Monde*. When I asked him whether the piece was especially challenging for the orchestra, he said, "No, nothing fazes them. They are ready for everything. And when they play a new, very difficult work like this one it sounds completely natural."

Ranking symphony orchestras is more sport than science. But in the classical-music world there is general agreement that, among the three hundred and twenty-five professional orchestras in America, the old pantheon of the Big Five—the orchestras of Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Cleveland, and Chicago—still holds. (Californians argue, with some justice, that the club should be renamed the Big Seven to admit the flourishing Los Angeles Philharmonic and the San Francisco Symphony.) Each of the Big Five has developed a certain institutional personality, and each plays a broad range of repertoire with brilliance and authority. But the Cleveland Orchestra is the only one with a collective identity; its hundred and five musicians have sustained a consistent approach to the immensely complicated business of symphonic music-making that illuminates whatever they happen to be playing as no other orchestra quite does and transcends whoever happens to be conducting them. For this reason, the Cleveland is widely regarded as the most "European" of the American orchestras, the only one that is distinctive and refined enough to stand alongside the two preëminent European ensembles: the Berlin Philharmonic and the Vienna Philharmonic.

Last summer, the orchestra toured Europe with its new music director, the young Austrian conductor Franz

Welser-Möst, and drew raves from critics who may not have been predisposed to bow down before an orchestra from the American heartland, especially during that election season. The previous autumn, when the orchestra played in Vienna at the Musikverein, the home of the Vienna Philharmonic, the hard-to-please Viennese cheered the visitors, and some of the Vienna players even turned up to hear them rehearse. This week, the Clevelanders arrive at Carnegie Hall with four programs featuring a characteristically sophisticated mixture of modern and traditional masterpieces, from a challenging new work by the English composer Sir Harrison Birtwistle to the five Beethoven piano concertos, with Radu Lupu as soloist.

The Clevelanders' triumphant tours came during tough times in their home town. After a decade of prosperity, the orchestra was running the biggest deficit in its history. Corporate support had dropped sharply, thanks in part to an exodus of Cleveland firms that had been happy to help bankroll the city's most prestigious cultural ambassador before they merged with companies whose headquarters were elsewhere. (During the past four years, the orchestra has lost five of its top ten corporate backers.) Ticket sales for the past several seasons were flat. Revenue from CDs had been diminishing since it became prohibitively expensive to record American symphony orchestras, in the late nineties. The musicians' contract was due to expire last August, and the orchestra faced a possible strike if its management didn't come up with wage increases and benefits that maintained parity with the other Big Five orchestras. Welser-Möst, even before his arrival, had agreed to a ten-per-cent reduction in his million-dollar-plus salary.

If you approach Severance Hall from downtown, you drive through several miles of urban dilapidation and patchy renewal: shut-down factories that once manufactured machine tools; faded frame houses with sagging front porches; an occasional car wash or soul-food restaurant; a cluster of new town houses that might have been dropped from the sky. Suddenly, you come to a startling vision: the willow-shaded garden and swan lagoon of the Cleveland Art Museum. Severance Hall, whose sober neoclassical façade belies the sumptuousness of its interior, occupies an imposing spot between this idyllic vista and the campus of Case Western Reserve University.

One afternoon, I met with James D. Ireland III, the president of the orchestra's governing board, the Musical Arts Association. Ireland, whom everyone calls Jamie, runs a venture-capital firm devoted to funding innovative businesses, mainly in northeastern Ohio. The scion of a prominent local family that made its money in iron ore, coal, and timber, he studied piano, violin, and organ as a boy. Before a concert, he often pores over a score borrowed from the orchestra's library. Recently, he acquired a set of bagpipes.

Ireland was off to a fund-raiser for a Republican congressman in the rolling, New England-like hills east of the city. Within minutes of leaving Severance Hall, we were driving through Cleveland's grand older suburbs, Cleveland Heights and Shaker Heights, past mansions in every conceivable style—a reminder of the city's boom years in the first decades of the last century.

"The challenge is how to maintain a world-class orchestra in what, at best, is a third-tier economy," Ireland told me. "A hundred years ago, Cleveland was the Seattle of its day in terms of entrepreneurial energy. Today, the city's population is just over half what it was seventy years ago"—it is now four hundred and seventy-eight thousand—"and the region is hemorrhaging manufacturing jobs to cheaper workplaces overseas. Public support for the arts has never been a big priority in this region, and the pool of private donors isn't getting any bigger." Ireland pointed out that the orchestra was, competitively, at a disadvantage with the other Big Five orchestras, which are in much larger and richer metropolitan areas. But, he added, "the one thing we can't afford to cut back on is quality. Our players don't think that their orchestra is one of the best in the world—they think it's the best. Of course, being good Clevelanders, they don't brag about it."

The Cleveland Orchestra, which made its début in 1918, gained its financial footing from civic-minded businessmen who saw the orchestra as a vehicle for spreading musical literacy in the schools. But the galvanizing spirit was a formidable impresario, Adella Prentiss

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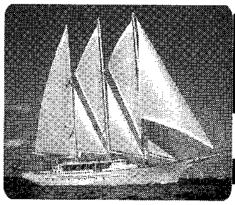
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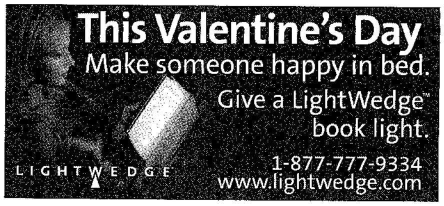
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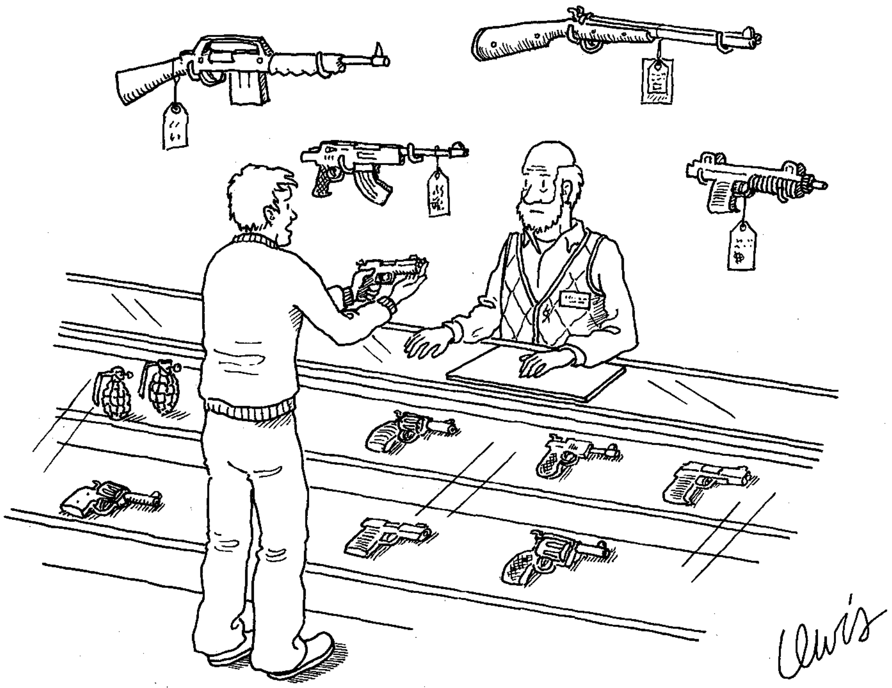
Hughes, who launched the first series of imported symphony performances in the country. From 1901 to 1920, eleven orchestras visited Cleveland, including the New York Philharmonic, under Gustav Mahler, and the Pittsburgh Symphony, under Richard Strauss.

The Cleveland Orchestra's first music director, Nikolai Sokoloff, an erratically gifted Russian, laid down three commandments for the players: "Be on time. Love your work. Look at me." His successor was Artur Rodzinski, a fiery Pole who implanted many of the virtues of ensemble playing that have prevailed ever since. But forging the lasting identity of the orchestra was really the work of George Szell, who became the Cleveland's fourth music director, in 1946. Szell, a tall Hungarian and a former piano prodigy, said that his dream was to create an ensemble that combined "the Americans' purity and beauty of sound and their virtuosity of execution with the European sense of tradition, warmth of expression, and sense of style."

Szell rebuilt the orchestra's personnel—twelve of his hires are still there—and established the world-class Cleveland Orchestra Chorus, under the leadership of Robert Shaw. He amassed a catalogue of recordings that are prized for their stylistic rightness, clarity of structure, rhythmic tension, and transparency of texture—qualities that enable a listener to follow the score virtually in his head. For Szell, the ideal orchestra had the teamwork of a string quartet. A photograph of Szell looking owlishly benevolent greets visitors to the greenroom in Severance Hall, but far more vivid are the memories of an autocrat whose perfectionism and force of personality remain very much alive, thirty-four years after his death. Christoph Eschenbach, who is now the music director of the Philadelphia Orchestra, made his American orchestral début as a pianist under Szell, and he remembers standing backstage with the maestro after a rehearsal: "We were talking about a passage in the Mozart concerto I was playing when Szell spotted a cleaning lady mopping the floor. He fixed her with that look he had, grabbed the mop, and said, 'Don't do it that way. Do it this way!' "

Klaus G. Roy, who wrote the orchestra's witty, erudite program notes for thirty years, recalls, "Szell liked to say, 'In Cleveland, we begin rehearsing when other orchestras stop,' but sometimes he didn't know when to quit. I remember a rehearsal of Mozart's 'Haffner' Symphony when he finally put his baton down and said, 'That was perfect—we don't have to do anything more.' Then he said, 'But there's one more spot . . . let's do that over.' Well, the spot got bigger and bigger until they'd gone through the whole thing all over again. By the time they played it that evening, it was dead."



"I want my gun to really scream, 'Look out—he's got a gun!' "

But Szell also had a gentler side. John Mack, the orchestra's principal oboist from 1965 until his recent retirement, tells a story about a rehearsal of Brahms's Academic Festival Overture: "He stopped me after a solo entrance and said, 'It's too sophisticated.' I played it again. 'That's too symphonic,' he said. I played it again. 'It's not raw enough,' he said. Finally, after I'd played it a fourth time, he smiled and said, 'Now it tastes like home cooking!' " (Szell was a fanatical amateur chef.)

Szell's greatest achievement was to instill in the players a sense of pride as members of an ensemble that would always give its best, no matter who was on the podium. But when he died, in 1970, there was no successor in place. The trustees' eventual choice, Lorin Maazel, proved a mixed blessing. Maazel, who is now the music director of the New York Philharmonic, maintained the level of virtuosity and expanded the range of programs to include twentieth-century repertoire that Szell had largely ignored. But the players chafed under Maazel's interpretive willfulness. John Mack recalled, "During an oboe solo in the Brahms First, he asked me to play a high D pianissimo, a dynamic marking that was not in the score. When I asked why, he said, 'Off the top of my head, I thought it would be beautiful.' His whim was more important than Brahms's reasoned judgment."

The eighteen-year tenure of Maazel's successor, the German conductor Christoph von Dohnányi, who arrived in 1984, marked a return to the Szell tradition. An intellectually probing taskmaster, Dohnányi restored the virtues of exquisite equilibrium and rigorous fidelity to the score; at the same time, he gave the orchestra a new zest for contemporary music.

Dohnányi's reign overlapped with that of Thomas W. Morris, an audiophile with a huge appetite for programming opportunities, who became the orchestra's executive director in 1987. Morris capitalized on the CD boom by making deals with major record labels that produced a stream of superb disks under Dohnányi, Boulez, and the orchestra's principal guest conductor, Vladimir Ashkenazy. The Cleveland was in great demand abroad—from Beijing to Salzburg. By the end of the nineties, the orchestra's endowment had climbed to a record $157 million. In 1998, “Bruce Wagner knows his Hollywood and writes like a wizard.”[2]

“WAGNER’S PROSE READS LIKE SOME UNHOLY COMBINATION OF RICK MOODY, ANTHONY LANE AND THE PAGE SIX GOSSIP COLUMNIST RICHARD JOHNSON...”[1]

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—*Entertainment Weekly*

“Bruce Wagner’s stories about Hollywood—and about many other places—are the best I’ve read since Scott Fitzgerald and Nathanael West; in short, the greatest.”
—Terry Southern

“What Wagner does, nobody does better. He is the Nathanael West, the Budd Schulberg of our time, the go-to guy for closely observed novels about a sun-soaked hellhole that may or may not be a real place.” —*The Washington Post*

“A millennial heir to Nathanael West, [Wagner] captures the stone-cold nihilism lurking just beneath the city’s glossy, cellulite-free surface and the deceptions and self-delusions that fuel so much of the deal making in town. . . .”
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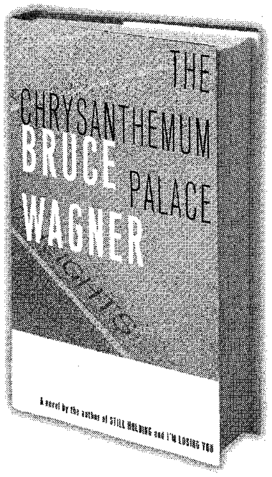

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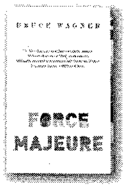

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1-*THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW* 2-JOHN UPDIKE

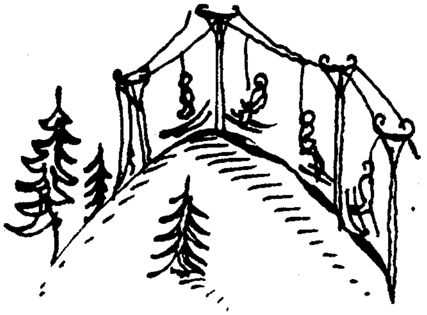
Dohnányi announced that he would not be renewing his contract. An unstated reason was the degree to which Morris, he felt, was masterminding the programs.

Meanwhile, during the nineteen-eighties and nineties, the city of Cleveland had embarked on a program of revitalization, enhancing its deteriorating downtown with two new stadiums; an arena for basketball and hockey; a warehouse district restored for loft living; a shopping mall named after the Galleria in Milan; a performing-arts center carved out of three old movie palaces; a science museum; and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. But the inner neighborhoods on the East Side remained persistently black and poor, as whites and affluent blacks continued their flight to the suburbs. And the city was still the butt of talk-show jokes that had started in 1969, after a conflagration of industrial wastes "set fire" to the serpentine Cuyahoga River, which divides the city in two. (In Cleveland, you are either an East Sider or a West Sider.) Increasingly, Cleveland was becoming the shrinking center in a crazy quilt of suburbs and edge cities, connected by freeways and spread over eight counties. Each one competed for people, jobs, and commerce, while contributing nothing to the city's eroded tax base. Last spring, the mayor of Cleveland, Jane Campbell, told me, "We need a new mentality if we're going to turn things around. We've been thinking of Cleveland as a special problem when we need to be thinking of it as part of a regional problem. Greater Cleveland has a population of three million, but it's all fragmented. We've got to start connecting the dots."

Richard Weiss, the Cleveland Orchestra's first assistant principal cellist, and his wife, Joela Jones, the principal keyboard player, both cherish Cleveland's thorniness. They came from Los Angeles and Miami, respectively, and they joined the orchestra in the nineteen-seventies. Although they live in the southeastern suburb of Solon, their favorite restaurant is on the West Side in Tremont, an old neighborhood of onion-domed Russian Orthodox churches which has lately attracted outsiders to its concentration of new restaurants and art galleries. I met them for dinner at Lola Bistro, an agreeably small place with a décor that I'd heard described as "hip-funky." They were greeted like old friends by the chef, Michael Symon, a burly native West Sider, who recommended the "rabbit strudel" and the "Slash 'n' Burn" (blackened grouper).

I told them a story that I'd heard from Tom Morris: A few years ago, a trustee of the orchestra who was in London when his home-town band was on tour there invited a British client to one of the concerts. The client accepted delightedly, but then asked, "Where is the Cleveland Orchestra from?" The two musicians smiled, as though the international obscurity of their city was precisely one of its charms. Weiss, a trim, dark-haired man, glanced around the dining room. "One of the reasons we like this restaurant so much is that it reminds us of Severance Hall," he said. "There's the predominance of gold and silver. There's the incredibly eclectic menu. And there's the open kitchen, where the chefs perform to appreciative diners. It's not a temple of 'fine dining'—it's just a really comfortable place to have good food. Severance Hall is opulent but not overwhelming. It's just a really good place to hear good music."

Jones, a blond, sunny-faced woman, has played frequently not only with the Cleveland but also as a soloist with many other orchestras around the country. I asked her what she felt set the Clevelanders apart. "For me, it's the sound," she said. "During the renovation, when Dohnányi suggested restoring an old Skinner organ that had been up in the attic for many years, quite a few people wanted to scrap it altogether in favor of a new, brighter-sounding instrument. I thought it very important to stick with the old one, because of its round, full timbre, and finally everyone agreed. That's precisely the sound of the orchestra—it's noble and never harsh." She added that when she sits inside the orchestra she is constantly gaining technical and musical insights from the other sections, even when she is not playing. "I've learned a lot about articulation just from sitting near the wind instruments," she said. "Now I breathe more in my phrasing. And I can hear how hard everyone tries to sacrifice a little bit of individuality for the over-all blend."



Trying to pin down the qualities that distinguish the Cleveland players has long been a pastime within the orchestra. Gary Hanson, the new executive director—he succeeded Morris last spring—said, "It's interesting that a gritty city like Cleveland should develop an orchestra that, to my ears, makes all the others sound slightly dirty." Hanson, who is a native of Toronto, had previously run the marketing and public-relations department, and also supervised the renovation of Severance Hall. He has a watchful manner that contrasts sharply with the ebullience of his predecessor. ("Gary was musically trained as a bass player," one of his colleagues pointed out; "Tom was a percussionist.") "The Cleveland audience may be like no other in the country," Hanson said. "It's open to everything the orchestra chooses to give them." He pointed out that although the audience may amount to only a fraction of the Greater Cleveland population, its loyalty runs unusually deep. "Forty per cent of our patrons have been subscribers for more than twenty years," he said. "This is an audience that exists over decades."

We were having lunch at Flower, a restaurant near Severance Hall, and as we were waiting for our raincoats from the check room, a couple walked in and asked the manager if one of the rooms was available for a private party. "Just a minute," the manager said. He opened a drawer and took out a schedule of the orchestra's upcoming programs. "Sorry," he said. "Franz is conducting that night."

I asked the manager how closely his reservations were tied to the orchestra's schedule. "We can tell pretty well how busy we'll be, depending on what they're playing," he said.

"You mean you're likely to be full if they're playing Beethoven?" I asked.

"I don't know anything about Beethoven," the manager said. "But the guy in the kitchen does."

I sat down with Franz Welser-Möst one afternoon in his dressing room backstage at Severance Hall. With his open manner and youthful, clean-cut looks, he could more easily be taken for a

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THE LAWYER FAIRY

graduate student than a world-famous maestro who was about to turn forty-four. He showed me a snapshot of himself and a friendly dolphin which had been taken during his last holiday. He also showed me a score of Richard Strauss's opera "Elektra," which he had conducted with blazing authority the previous evening. When I complimented him on how well he had kept the feverish music afloat, he handed me some sheets of paper on which he had meticulously copied all fifty-nine of the score's motifs and drawn up a list of its different keys, one for each of the characters. "I did this a few years ago, when I first conducted 'Elektra,' in Zurich," he told me. "It's the only way I can make it clear to myself."

The appointment of Welser-Möst as the orchestra's seventh music director surprised many in the classical-music world. He had shown great skill as a guest conductor with the Cleveland and other leading American orchestras, but his only previous experience as the head of a major symphony organization had been something of a fiasco. In 1990, at the age of thirty, he was named the music director of the London Philharmonic Orchestra, succeeding the revered Klaus Tennstedt. During his six-year tenure, London's snappish critics gave him a rough time, and some of the L.P.O. players dubbed him Frankly Worse than Most. In his next job, however, as the music director of the Zurich Opera, he built a considerable reputation conducting a wide range of repertoire, from "The Magic Flute" to Berg's "Lulu." Tom Morris told me, "With this orchestra, the job of music director is, essentially, about fine-tuning a tradition. Franz satisfied our basic criteria: he understood the great classical repertoire; he was a hard worker who knew how to rehearse; and he was someone who could do the job for at least ten years and for whom the orchestra would be his primary focus. And he told us that, without losing the qualities for which the orchestra is renowned, he wanted to warm things up."

At Welser-Möst's first rehearsal, in the fall of 2002, he told the players, "My name is Franz"—an egalitarian gesture that was revolutionary for an orchestra that would never have dreamed of addressing previous music directors as George or Christoph. He turned down suggestions that he buy a big house on Lake Erie; instead, he and his wife, Angelika, moved into an apartment off Shaker Square, an elegant old shopping center on the city's edge, to which they can walk for a cup of coffee. In his first season in Cleveland, he made it a point to conduct the annual Fourth of July concert in Public Square, a free community event attended by eighty thousand people, which Dohnányi had skipped.

Welser-Möst grew up in the Austrian city of Linz, on the Danube River. He had a cultivated childhood—his father was a doctor, his mother a member of the Austrian parliament—and he studied first the violin, then the piano. When he was eighteen, he was driving with friends to play a concert of Schubert's "Trout" Quintet when their car skidded off an icy road. Three of his vertebrae were broken, and the nerve damage he suffered in the fourth and fifth fingers of his left hand ended his career as an instrumentalist. During eight months of recovery, he decided that the only way he could stay in music was to become a conductor. An early mentor was Herbert von Karajan, the lord of the European music world, who admired the young man's ability to master scores and his self-assurance on the podium. "I can't explain why I know how to conduct," Welser-Möst told me. "It's a gift I discovered."

In 1986, he made his début with the London Philharmonic, conducting Mozart's "Requiem." Of the difficulties he encountered as the successor to Tennstedt, he said, "I was too green, and I was unsophisticated about the pack mentality of the London music critics. Their hostility got so bad that I thought of giving up conducting altogether." I asked him about the musicians' nickname for him. He laughed and said, "Well, they called Georg Solti the Screaming Skull."

Welser-Möst's approach to programming is thoroughly considered. "First, there is the need of the Cleveland audience to be challenged," he said. "Dohnányi was very good at nurturing a sense of discovery, and our audience really gets it." To this end, he has commissioned a cosmopolitan assortment of premières from, among others, the Finnish composer Kaija Saariaho, the Norwegian composer Rolf Wallin, and the young American composer Susan Botti. At the same time, Welser-Möst believes that the audience should be exposed regularly to the "greatest masterpieces" of Western music, especially in opera and oratorio, and he has programmed a succession of blockbusters, including Verdi's "Don Carlo," Beethoven's "Missa Solemnis," and Bach's "St. Matthew Passion."

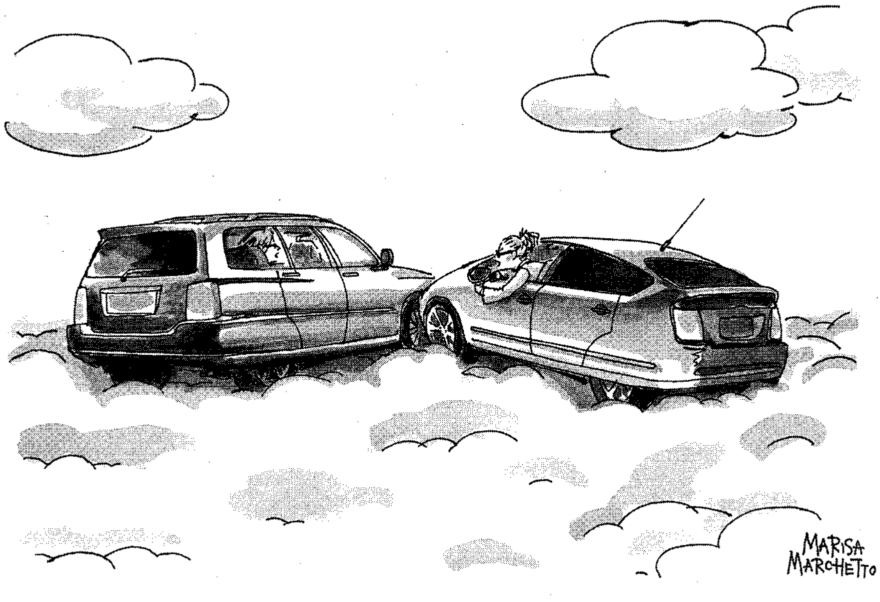
Another imperative is to perform pieces that will help the orchestra maintain its mastery of the classical style. Welser-Möst said, "I'm programming a lot of Haydn, Mozart, and Schubert, because they require great refinement of phrasing. For an orchestra, it's good hygiene. And then I'm constantly thinking about pieces I want to conduct for the first time, especially with this orchestra." He stressed the importance of new approaches to old repertoire: "If you've heard a great recording of the piece you're working on, put it out of your mind, even if it's your own recording."

When Welser-Möst was nineteen, Karajan welcomed him into his rehearsals with the Berlin Philharmonic. "I saw how a conductor could enable an orchestra to become a powerful personality that exceeded the sum of its parts," he recalled. "Karajan once said something absolutely brilliant: 'I give them all the freedom they need to make them do what I want.' "

The Karajan strategy was at work in the concerts I heard of the Cleveland Orchestra and its new music director. During their first appearance together at Carnegie Hall two years ago, they played an assortment of waltzes and polkas by Johann Strauss. For long stretches of the performance, Welser-Möst simply dropped his arms and basked in the Waltz King's glow. The playing was free—and exactly how he wanted it. The Clevelanders now had a music director who seemed to enjoy hearing what they had to say even more than he enjoyed telling them how to say it. At Severance Hall, I heard more evidence of the Welser-Möst style—a Brahms Third Symphony that supplanted the usual brow-knitting with lighthearted ardor; a Schubert's Ninth Symphony that caught the innocent dance in the composer's wandering imagination. During "Elektra," I was made aware of the haunting sweetness that lurks just under the hysteria. These performances had the dual purpose of refreshing the habitual concertgoer and seducing the neophyte.

Welser-Möst and the orchestra are still a collaboration in progress. I detected a notable gain in assurance between early performances of a particular piece and later ones. I also heard a tendency to sweep the music along for the sake of vivacity, at the expense of argument—a complaint that has been persistently registered by the classical music critic of the Cleveland *Plain Dealer*, Donald Rosenberg, a confidant of Dohnányi and the author of an institutional history, "The Cleveland Orchestra Story: 'Second to None.' " But under Welser-Möst the Clevelanders are presenting musical narratives that work by contagion rather than by instruction. "We're seeing more spontaneity with Franz, which can make things a bit riskier," Peter Czornyj, the orchestra's artistic administrator, told me. "He's letting more performance happen in the performances, and the musicians are responding."

Scott Haigh, a bass player who has been with the orchestra for twenty-six years, said, "Sometimes Franz underconducts, and we're not quite sure what to do. It can get a little scary. But he's trying to bring a joyousness to the sound that I like very much." As Joshua Smith, the principal flutist, put it, "There's greater growth in our performances than we had under Christoph, whose approach was to insure that everyone knew from the outset exactly what was going to happen. But it means that each of us now has to take more responsibility for achieving our goals."



"No! Bless you!"

An important clue to the Cleveland Orchestra's sense of continuity is its refusal to hold blind auditions, which have become almost obligatory for American orchestras. Although the Cleveland auditions require the candidates to be seen as well as heard, the determining factor is not appearance but musical compatibility. "We're not necessarily looking for the most virtuoso player," Ralph Curry, a cellist who is also the orchestra's personnel manager, told me. "We're looking for the player whose way of making music will best fit in with the Cleveland style. We don't interview the candidate—we're looking at the personality as it's expressed through the music." The winner then joins the orchestra for a probationary period. After two seasons, the probationer is either let go or permanently hired. "But once you're in," Curry points out, "it's not over. There's the healthy pressure of knowing that you're not just playing to please the audience—you're playing to please the hundred tough critics around you."

Being a member of the Cleveland Orchestra is more than a full-time job. "The precision for which we're famous means that we put in many hours of off-site preparation," Richard Weiss told me. "We rehearse and perform different repertoire each week. The amount of practice time can vary from, say, eight to ten hours a week if the program is familiar, to four or five hours a day if we're playing a new work that may not have arrived until two weeks before the première." Every week, the full orchestra has four or five rehearsals. Last year, the Cleveland played a hundred and fifty concerts, including fourteen at their summer home, the Blossom Music Center, an architecturally striking structure with superb acoustics. The orchestra has always had a vital educational role in the life of the city; its weekday concerts are attended by thirty thousand schoolchildren each year.

The orchestra's annual salaries begin

at the base of $100,620, the lowest among the Big Five orchestras, but players with seniority—the current age range is from twenty-six to seventy—are paid on a par with their Big Five counterparts. The recent salary dispute was resolved last November, after negotiations that—in light of a deficit that now surpasses seven million dollars—were particularly tense. Eventually, each side got something of what it wanted. Management, which pointed out that the cost of living in Cleveland is significantly lower than it is in New York, Boston, Chicago, and Philadelphia, won the right to freeze the entry-level salary for a year and then increase it to $103,610 by March, 2006—a figure well below the New York Philharmonic's new three-year cap of $113,360. The players won the right to renegotiate the contract at the end of two years. For the first time, both sides agreed to allow radio broadcasts to be streamed on the Internet. This, along with tours to sixteen cities this year, here and abroad, will expand the orchestra's global visibility and, as a result, its ability to raise money beyond the Cleveland area.

One morning last May, I joined the orchestra on the stage of Severance Hall for a rehearsal of Shostakovich's Fifteenth Symphony. A little before ten o'clock, I took a seat in the back and watched the musicians file in. They were dressed in casual clothes, and they had left the chitchat outside. Immediately, they started tooting, blaring, bowing, and pounding, warming up fingers, arms, and lungs. Then, just as suddenly, they stopped. With the arrival of Welser-Möst, who was dressed in jeans and a polo shirt, they put down their instruments. "Good morning," he said. He glanced at William Preucil, the concertmaster, who nodded hello. Then, without further ado, he raised his arms, and they were off.

To be inside an orchestra like the Cleveland is to feel your nerve endings exposed. You acquire a new set of ears. You're sitting perfectly still, yet your heart is racing. You feel a hundred pairs of ears, eyes, arms, and hands working as one to give shape, direction, pulse, color, and meaning to the insubstantiality of sound. You feel the intensity of a hundred people listening to one another.

Shostakovich's final symphonic work is the last will and testament of the twentieth century's most embattled composer. It is a montage of humor, wistfulness, rapture, and premonitions of death. Early on, the symphony quotes a favorite childhood piece—Rossini's "William Tell" Overture. Later, we hear the theme of Siegfried's death from the end of Wagner's "Ring." Its final fade into nothingness is driven by a tapping of the percussion that sounds like a medicinal drip.

Welser-Möst did not lecture the players about what this strange valedictory masterpiece was up to; he let them discover it as they went along. He had told me, "I don't believe in imposing my emotions on the music—I believe in drawing the emotions out of the music." He never commanded, he requested: "Please, can we begin again at bar 113?" As Scott Haigh had said, "When he looks at you, he invites you to play."

Preucil, the tall, balding concertmaster, whose darting eyes seemed an extension of Welser-Möst's baton, had told me that a good part of the players' work with their new music director had to do with "adjusting the sound concept," as suggested by a score's dynamic markings. "We're still learning, for example, what 'sotto voce' or 'grazioso' means to Franz. And how they apply in a given piece."

In this regard, Welser-Möst's instructions were never merely technical. To Joshua Smith, who opened the piece with a mordant, jokey flute solo, he said, "Can we have it a little more mechanical, please? Like a toy." During the "William Tell" quotation, he said to the strings, "Can we have more urgency in the pizzicato, please? And remember, in Italian music the last beats should be kind of laid back." He wore his pedagogy vividly: "When the 'Tristan' chord goes into the major, Shostakovich is evoking angels." And: "On the third repeat, really pianissimo, please. Time has to stand still."

As if by some mysterious alchemy of which only these people knew the secret, the fragments came together: the dots got connected. At precisely twelve-thirty, after the players had gone through the ghostly last page for the third time, Welser-Möst smiled and put down his baton. "Thank you," he said. ♦

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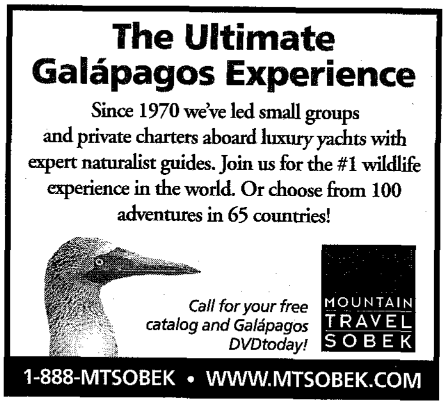

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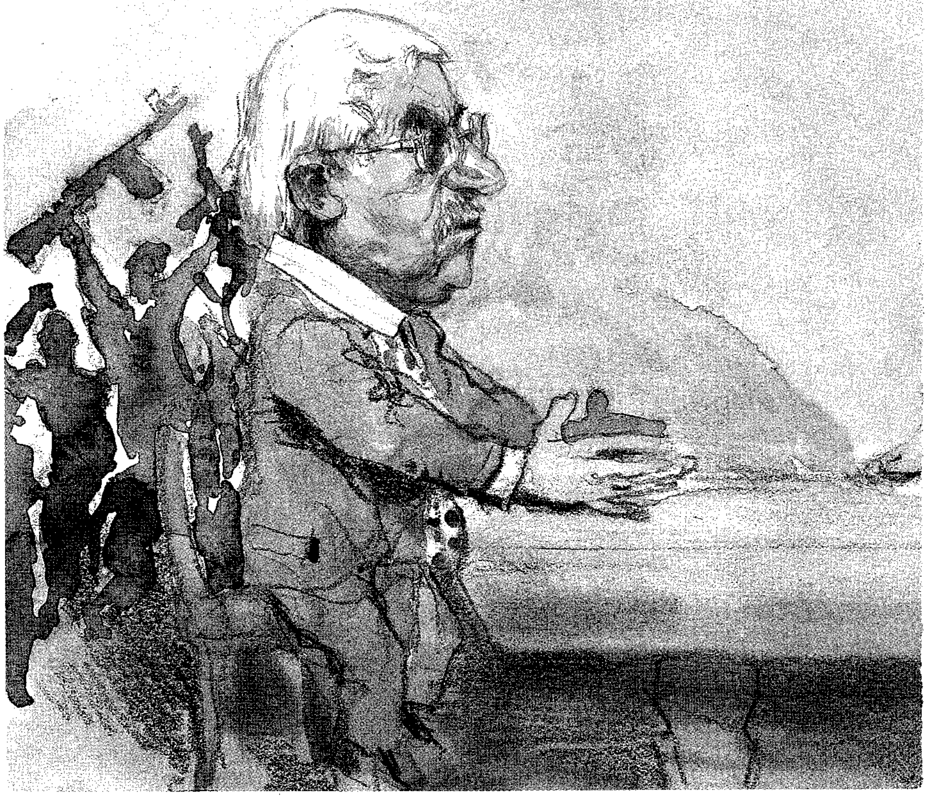
A REPORTER AT LARGE

CHECKPOINT

A new Palestinian leader confronts Ariel Sharon.

BY DAVID REMNICK



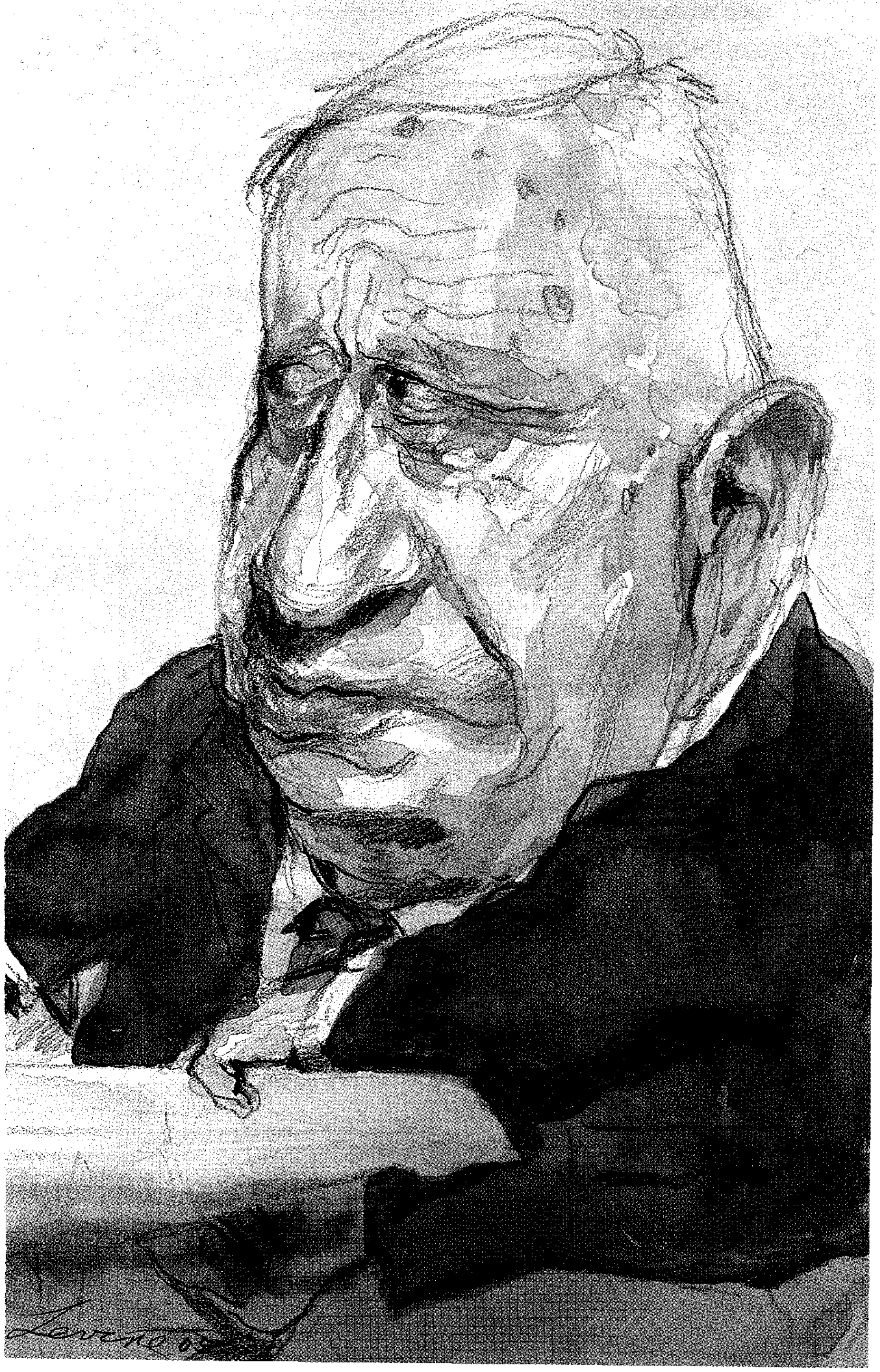
Mahmoud Abbas knew that he was considered too stiff, too gray, too soft, too disapproving

DAVID LEVINE

After three decades of exile in Jordan, Lebanon, and Tunisia, Yasir Arafat and the leadership of the Palestinian Liberation Organization returned to Palestine in 1994 and eventually made Ramallah the P.L.O.'s administrative center. They refurbished a police compound, which had been built under the British Mandate, and turned it into a headquarters, their *muqata.* And there, Arafat was convinced, the Palestinians would negotiate the terms of an independent state and prepare for the move to Jerusalem.

The *muqata* was never a very elegant compound, looking more like an East German hospital complex than like the center of a fledgling country. Arafat was an incessant traveller, hooked on the glamour of the official visit, but when he was in Ramallah he worked and slept in a set of small, modest rooms. Then, in late 2000, after final status negotiations collapsed at Camp David, an era of promise ended and the second intifada began; Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon answered a series of suicide bombings in 2002 with an overwhelming military operation called Operation Defensive Shield. Suddenly, every major Palestinian city was under curfew, flooded with Israeli soldiers. In Ramallah, tanks converged on the *muqata* and ripped holes in the walls. At times, there was no electricity in the buildings, no communications. Cell-phone batteries were at a premium. And with the Israelis dropping hints that they might finally finish off Arafat, or at least deport him, the Palestinian leader became a prisoner in his own office. He received visitors in a dusty room that reeked of burst sewage pipes. Conversations were hard to hear over the sounds from the parking lot outside, the tanks swivelling their turrets, the tank treads gnashing the macadam. He protected terrorists even after he assured the United States that he was prosecuting them. At times, he seemed unhinged. "Pray for me to attain martyrdom!" Arafat said on Egyptian television. "Is there anything better than being martyred on this holy land?" When the Israelis relaxed their hold, last year, the Palestinians waited a long time before beginning any reconstruction on the *muqata.* They left some rooms a wreck, the better to dramatize their embattlement. They left the parking lot littered with debris—burned-out cars, oil cans filled with concrete—to make it harder for the tanks to return.

Less than three months ago, on November 11th, Arafat died, of an undisclosed ailment, in a hospital outside Paris. He was seventy-five. His body was flown to the outskirts of Cairo for a military funeral the next morning and on to Ramallah for a Palestinian funeral. Now Arafat, who envisaged for himself a founder's burial near the Al Aqsa Mosque, in Jerusalem, is entombed in the *muqata* parking lot. And Ramallah, like every other city in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, remains surrounded by the surveillance technology and military hardware of the Israeli occupation forces. Nearly all Palestinians see Arafat as a patriarch, but few deny that his final



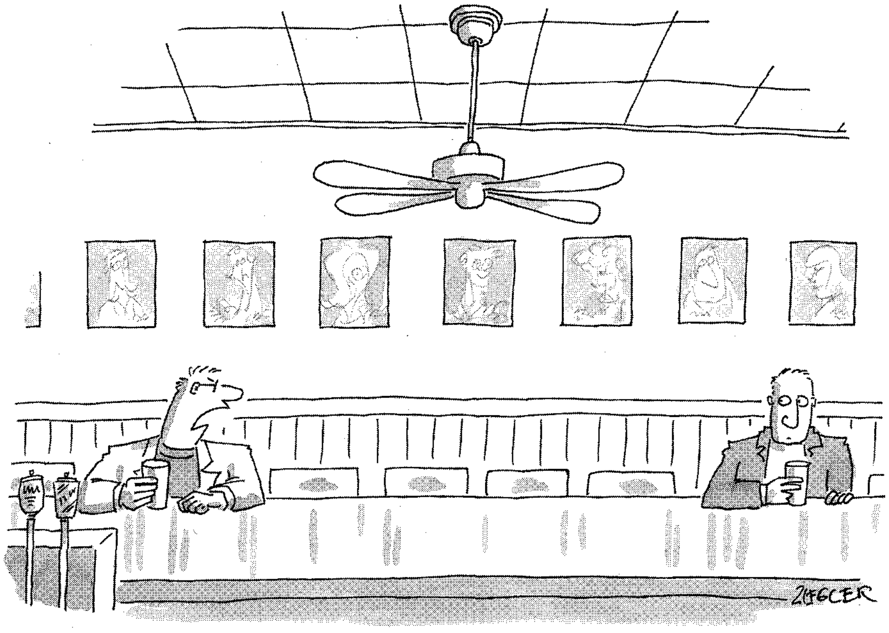
ed struggle. His election strategy was plain: he was Arafat Lite.

years were a prolonged coda of political futility. The first intifada, in the late eighties, awoke Israelis to the moral disaster of occupation; the second, with its heroized suicides and targeted assassinations, has all but ended, and the most tangible result is more than four thousand dead, more Jewish settlements in the West Bank, more checkpoints, more suspicion, and a security wall. When Arafat died, the Palestinians were further away from statehood than they were when he first came to Ramallah, a decade ago.

Arafat was a revolutionary leader who treated the issue of succession with disinterest. Hussam Khader, a P.L.O. leader in Nablus, once mocked Arafat's rejection of mortality by suggesting that perhaps he be elected "the god of Palestine." Some of his earliest brothers-in-arms, like Abu Jihad and Abu Iyad, had been killed by the Israelis or by Arab rivals, like Abu Nidal; those who survived he often treated with contempt. According to one of his biographers, Saïd Aburish, Arafat used to call the P.L.O. diplomats Saeb Erekat *gahel*, "ignorant," and Hanan Ashrawi *sharmootah*, "whore."

And yet there was little confusion among Palestinians over what was coming next. Even as Arafat lingered in Paris, only one man—a refugee and a senior figure in the P.L.O. named Mahmoud Abbas—was taken seriously as a successor. Abbas, who goes by his nom de guerre, Abu Mazen, is a serene, uncharismatic man nearing seventy. He had been a member of Arafat's circle since the founding of Fatah, the dominant faction in the P.L.O., four decades ago. He served as Arafat's lead negotiator at the secret Oslo talks, in 1993, and at many other political initiatives. Abbas does not, as Arafat did, wear fatigues or a pistol on his hip. He has never played a military role in the movement. He wears a suit. The ashy bags under his eyes, the silvery hair and mustache, and his formal bearing give him the aspect of a certain kind of faded movie actor—Cesar Romero, say, in late middle age.

Last year, while both Sharon and the Bush Administration were ignoring Arafat, having declared him "the main obstacle" to negotiations and peace, Abbas served a four-month stint as Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority. During that time, he repeatedly said that the "militarization" of the intifada against Israel—the shift from the rock to the suicide belt—had been a grave and self-defeating "mistake." He has also made it clear that he thought Arafat had undermined the cause in 1991 when he backed Saddam Hussein in the first Gulf War. These positions were received far more enthusiastically in Jerusalem and Washington than on the streets of Ramallah, Nablus, Gaza City, or Khan Yunis, and Arafat, who was not keen to share power, even when he had little, did nothing to help Abbas make progress in his negotiations with Israel. Arafat took to mocking his Prime Minister as a Palestinian Hamid Karzai, a reference to the Afghan President, who is generally considered among Arabs to be a stooge of the Bush White House. And soon, quite predictably, Abbas was



"Hey, you! Wanna be my best friend?"

• •

gone, undercut by Arafat and replaced by a colorless bureaucrat known as the other of "the two Abus"—Abu Ala. Only death, it was clear, would loosen Arafat's grip on power.

The afternoon of Arafat's burial, the *muqata* parking lot was jammed with thousands of mourners, almost all of them men, many armed with pistols and AK-47s, which they fired into the air. Their show of chaotic grief was genuine—Arafat is regarded among his people as the man who created the Palestinian movement, unified its disparate factions, and then, through terror, diplomacy, theatrics, and his own peculiar persona, kept the cause before the world's wandering attention. But within a few days the emotion faded. The traditional forty-day mourning period seemed to last no longer than a week. Workmen erected a glass-walled mourning hall, but few visitors came. The talk in the press—Palestinian, Israeli, and beyond—was all of the future, of a vague sense of opportunity. The most prominent Palestinian pollster, Khalil Shikaki, reported that optimism had not run so high among ordinary Palestinians in five years. Even Arafat's most ardent admirers were pleased by the idea of a new start.

Abbas began his campaign for the Presidency of the Palestinian Authority on Christmas Day. His victory in the January 9th elections was deemed a near-certainty. There was only one potential candidate with any mass following, Marwan Barghouti, a diminutive man of steely intelligence and ruthless measures. Barghouti, unlike Abbas, was fluent in the rhetoric of armed struggle but also had a deeper understanding of Israeli politics than most of his P.L.O. elders. In the end, he decided that his candidacy was impractical. His decision was made in an Israeli prison, where he is serving five life sentences for his part in several terrorist operations. Abbas's only opponent of note was Mustafa Barghouti (distantly related to Marwan), a leftist and the head of a health-care-relief agency, who advertised himself as a more pugnacious adversary of the Israelis; his most prevalent ad showed him in a confrontation with several Israeli soldiers.

Even before the campaign started, Abbas had moved out of his offices in northern Ramallah and occupied a suite in the *muqata*. Yet he was careful not to move into Arafat's old wing—those bare ruined halls and the artifacts within were being preserved as a kind of museum—and, despite all their disputes over the years, Abbas began every public appearance with a paean to the dead leader. Of all the factions, Fatah had the most money for advertising, campaign workers, television, travel. It could even feel safe in leaving the matter of turnout to a distinguished guest: the American actor Richard Gere filmed a commercial for Palestinian television, in which he said, "Hi, I'm Richard Gere and I'm speaking for the entire world. It's really important. Get out and vote."

Abbas knew that he was considered too stiff, too gray, too soft, too disapproving of "armed struggle." His election strategy was plain: he was Arafat Lite, people said, a man who would follow the Arafat line but without the autocratic style, without the fatigues or the cronyism or the calls for a "million martyrs" to march on Jerusalem. A ubiquitous Abbas campaign poster showed him and Arafat together, smiling, over the rubric "In Your Way, We Will Approach the Palestinian Dream."

One afternoon during the campaign, at a refurbished meeting hall in the *muqata*, I met with Nabil Aburdeneh, Arafat's closest aide, the sort one comes to think of as the whisperer, the briefcase man. He sat down in a pleasant, freshly painted room graced with new leatherette couches, a new rug, recessed lighting. Aburdeneh was full of enthusiasm for the election. Abbas, he said by way of endorsement, is "one of our historical leaders. He was behind Oslo, he was at Camp David, he was at Wye River"—during the Clinton Administration. "He was always involved with Arafat. Abu Mazen is taking all the posts of Arafat. He is the man of peace and the coming era." He continued, "We are going to test Sharon and the American Administration. All along, they said that Arafat was the obstacle. Well, now Arafat is not here. What now?"

In 1982, after the Israeli Army had invaded Lebanon in an effort to oust the P.L.O., Abbas flew to Moscow for a series of meetings. One of his sessions was with Meir Vilner, the secretary-general of the Israeli Communist Party. Vilner told Abbas about an exchange he'd had with Sharon, who was then Defense Minister, in Jerusalem at the Knesset. "Vilner was leaving as Sharon was going in," Abbas writes in a 1995 memoir, "Through Secret Channels":

> Their eyes met, but no words were exchanged. Sharon grabbed Vilner's shoulder

> and demanded, "Why do you not greet me? Why do you turn away from me?" Vilner replied, "I do not greet a bloodletter." "Are you talking about the Palestinians?" Sharon asked. "Yes," said Vilner, "I mean the blood of Palestinians, I mean the siege of Beirut. I mean your lust for killing. Don't you think they are human beings like us who also have rights?" As Vilner walked out of the door Sharon said, "One day you will realize that it is I who will establish the Palestinian State."

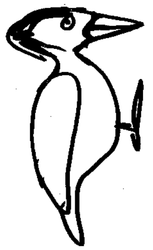
Twenty-two years later, Abbas was running for the chance to negotiate with a man whom he had always understood to be a butcher, an architect of the settlements in Gaza and the West Bank, but who now, with unprecedented popularity, had come to the point where he recognized the need for a Palestinian state. For decades, Sharon had rejected the notion that the Palestinians had any right to territory lost, mile by mile. Let Jordan, already a majority Palestinian state, take in its brethren, he would say. In the 2003 elections for Prime Minister, it was the Labor Party candidate, Amram Mitzna, who suggested that Israel re-start the process by withdrawing, unilaterally, from Gaza. This is the position that Sharon has now assumed.

"I do not think that we have to rule over another people and run their lives," Sharon told an Israeli interviewer, Ari Shavit, in 2003. "I do not think that we have the strength for that." It was a calculation born less of moral reckoning than of demographic reality. With Jewish immigration plummeting and the Palestinian presence between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean growing, Sharon decided to begin a process of "disengagement," starting with a civil and military withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, in July, 2005. Soldiers would be moved completely into Israel proper and more than seven thousand settlers would be uprooted—by force, if necessary.

During the campaigning last month, I met with many of Arafat's old confederates in the P.L.O. and asked them if they shared the kind of optimism about a new start which was reflected in polls. They did not. The people, they insisted, were actually exhausted, demoralized. The intifada could not be counted a victory. Sharon was dictating the situation so thoroughly that most Palestinians were hoping for things far more modest than a final settlement: fewer checkpoints along the roads, military withdrawal from the cities. Sharon has said that he is willing to re-start the international diplomatic process known as the Road Map, but he also reserves the right to slow things down, or even withdraw from the process. Hanan Ashrawi, the longtime P.L.O. negotiator, told me, "Abu Mazen's prospects are very difficult. It seems that in Israeli political discourse the only acceptable Palestinian is a Zionist, one willing to give up on the right of return of refugees and one who refuses any dialogue with militant groups. They want a tailor-made Palestinian leader who will play the game by Israeli rules and then cannot possibly have the credibility to sell a deal to the Palestinian people."

Any sense that Sharon might be leaving Gaza as a first step toward a full and fair settlement was undercut last fall, when *Ha'aretz* published an astonishing interview with Dov Weissglas, a Tel Aviv lawyer who is one of Sharon's most intimate advisers. Weissglas acknowledged that the only reason Sharon had made a move was grudging Realpolitik; he had come to understand that "everything was stuck." The economy was weak, soldiers were refusing to serve in the occupied territories—"These were not weird kids with green ponytails and a ring in their nose who give off a strong odor of grass"—and unofficial plans for a two-state solution were gaining surprisingly high popular acceptance. However, Weissglas said, "The disengagement is actually formaldehyde. It supplies the amount of formaldehyde that's necessary so that there will not be a political process":

> It legitimizes our contention that there is no negotiating with the Palestinians. There is a decision here to do the minimum possible in order to maintain our political situation. . . . It thrusts [the Palestinians] into a situation in which they have to prove their seriousness. There are no more excuses. There are no more Israeli soldiers spoiling their day. And for the first time they have a slice of land with total continuity on which they can race from one end to the other in their Ferrari. And the whole world is watching them—them, not us.



The message was clear. Sharon was giving up Gaza—crowded, lawless Gaza, which even Yitzhak Rabin had once wished would "sink into the sea"—while planning to maintain far more of the West Bank than had been imagined in any of the previous talks with the Palestinians.

"Sharon seems to want to create a rump state in Gaza and that's all," Salim Tamari, a historian and sociologist at Birzeit University, in the West Bank, said, expressing a widespread view among Palestinian politicians and intellectuals. "Moshe Dayan thought that you could hold on to the territories and suspend sovereignty questions until the density of settlements had become a fait accompli. This is Sharon's logic, too. . . . I see Sharon's motives as Dov Weissglas expressed them.

"But this is shortsighted," Tamari continued. "It will only take a matter of months or a few years for the groups"—such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad—"to regain the ability to pull off military operations. In the thirty-seven years of occupation, Israel used every means of force—deportation, destruction of homes, imprisonment, assassination—to prevent resistance. It was never successful, and it's about time for the Israelis to realize that the use of force on their part cannot achieve security. Do they think they can keep the Palestinians in their cages forever?"

Yasir Arafat did not leave behind a democratic legacy. An autocrat to the end, he dominated politics, the press, the police, the flow of cash; he indulged sycophants, rewarded cronies, punished rebels, sometimes with beatings or jail. But, because the Palestinian movement has been a mixture of secularists and Islamists, capitalists and Communists, Arafat always had to maneuver, to include, to permit a modicum of debate, to a point unthinkable in nearly all the rest of the Arab world. "We had Baathists, Marxists, pro-Syrian people, pro-Jordanian, pro-Iraqi," Yasser Abed Rabbo, one of Arafat's principal negotiators, said. "What Arafat did, and it's to be praised, is that he brought this mosaic together into the P.L.O. and it found a way of co-existence. Otherwise, we would have splintered into a thousand pieces. . . . This was the mother experience, the crucial experience, of the P.L.O. The experience of the rest of the Arab world would have given us something very different." The democratic example of Israel, Rabbo readily conceded, was also a profound influence.

By the New Year holiday, the campaign rolled along with an almost preternatural ease. As Abbas made stops in Gaza, the outskirts of Jerusalem, and the West Bank, he seemed suddenly to be adapting to the theatrical dimensions of elections, glad-handing, making spirited speeches. "We may be laying the foundations for the second working democracy in the Middle East," a Palestinian legislator, Ziad Abu-Amr, said. "In Iraq, you Americans are imposing something. This democracy comes under the conditions of occupation and national struggle, but the Palestinian people are imposing their own regime. If the Palestinians can do this under duress, under occupation, then these other countries—Egypt, Syria, and the rest—cannot call their 'referendums' real elections."

A week before election day, I joined a few colleagues on a trip to the West Bank city of Nablus, where the fighting had been especially heavy during Operation Defensive Shield. Historically, Nablus was a mercantile center. For the Israelis, Nablus had distinguished itself as a center of terror: the old city (the Casbah), An-Najah University, and the nearby Balata refugee camp were all known as bastions of support for armed groups, and Beit Furik, a village outside the city, is widely known as a "cradle" of bombers the way some towns in the American South are known for their quarterbacks or spoon bread. In 2002, Sharon sent troops and about a hundred tanks and armored personnel carriers into Nablus to make arrests and, if necessary, kill fighters for the armed groups; the city is still under siege.

As we passed through an Israeli checkpoint and arrived at the outskirts of Nablus, we saw Arafat's local *muqata*, and it, too, was in ruins. The Palestinian police had left the rubble as a kind of monument; Arafat's bathtub was visible through a blasted wall. There were posters everywhere commemorating martyrs—children and teen-agers who had exploded themselves, and Israelis, for the cause—and graffiti that said, "Jerusalem Is in Our Eyes."

At Balata, we met with Tayseer Nasrallah, the head of human rights for the refugee camp, where more than twenty thousand people live. The term "refugee camp" summons images of tent villages—and that certainly was Balata in the early nineteen-fifties—but the United Nations and other agencies long ago supplied money to help build rough-hewn apartment blocks and schools. To this day, Balata is contiguous with the city of Nablus but relies on few of its services. This insistent separation of cities and their camps is typical throughout the occupied territories. "Our concern in Balata is to keep the symbolism alive of the refugee camps," Nasrallah said. "The camp is the living witness to the Palestinian tragedy of 1948."

Nasrallah kept his office in a small cultural center that had been paid for by the government of Belgium. As a representative of the refugees, he had been on the stage with Abbas when he gave his first campaign speech; Nasrallah was determined to put the Arafat era behind him. "The personality of Arafat will never be repeated ever again. *Inshallah*, God willing," he said. "We suffered for having someone who was a symbolic, charismatic figure. We want someone who will understand our suffering, build institutions, and doesn't want to be considered a god. There is only one god in the sky."

But, once Nasrallah went beyond his general support for Abbas, the thorniest dilemmas of Palestinian politics—in particular, the problem of refugees—came into focus. More than seven hundred thousand Palestinians fled Israel in 1948. The Palestinians, including Abbas, insist that U.N. resolutions and international law give them the right of return—not merely to a new Palestinian state but, if they wish, to Jaffa, to Haifa, to Ramla, the cities of modern Israel. Yet, if there is one issue on which nearly all Israelis agree, it is that a full right of return will mean the end of a Jewish majority state, and cannot be permitted. Abbas himself is a refugee. He was born in 1935 in the town of Safad, in the Galilee; in 1948, his family left for Syria. In various speeches, he has reaffirmed the Palestinian position on refugees—that their right of return is absolute and complete—but his image as a conciliator persists. This does not entirely please most Palestinians. The impression is that, while he is serious about insisting on the borders that prevailed before the 1967 Six-Day War, he is likely to compromise on refugees.

Nasrallah said, "We will accept a decision only after a referendum of all the refugees," including the ones in Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon. "Look," he said, "we are not seeking to throw the Jews into the sea. This land can absorb us all. If Jews can come from anywhere in the world, then Jaffa can accept us. Do you want us to go to China?. . . If they want a clean, purely Jewish state, they can go find it anywhere else in the world, but not here. This was not an empty land when they arrived."

A rainstorm pelted the roofs, but we could still hear the sound of drums outside—a parade of schoolchildren, Fatah scouts, pounding out the beat for the candidacy of Mahmoud Abbas. In Nablus, as in most Palestinian cities, many young people readily say that their greatest ambition is to die in the armed struggle against the Israelis, to hold a rifle or wear a suicide belt on the ubiquitous martyr posters. It was not hard to imagine that if Abbas and Sharon made no progress some of the scouts outside might one day be holding weapons instead of drumsticks.

Nasrallah's rationale for the terrorists in his ranks was a common one: "There is a motivation, they are terrorized. So the feeling is, Why not terrorize those who terrorize us? The message behind a suicide bomber is that. After Operation Defensive Shield, most young kids were willing to blow themselves up. In Balata, if you want to open an office for suicide bombers, it will do a better business than anything else. Israeli policies are creating new enemies every day."

In the short term, Abbas's most complicated internal political problem was persuading the fighters to put down their arms. In discussions I had with Israeli officials in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv—with Sharon, several of his close advisers, and his two Deputy Prime Ministers, Ehud Olmert and Shimon Peres; intelligence chiefs; the Foreign Minister, Silvan Shalom; and allies in the Knesset—not one of them seemed to think that Abbas had the means to unify the myriad Palestinian security forces and control terror for very long. They saw him as a man of positive intentions but little strength, and no real constituencies. "With your permission," one senior Israeli intelligence official said of Abbas, "I think he has olives, not balls."

The Palestinian Authority, which was established in 1994, as part of the Oslo accords, to run the territories until statehood, has been in free fall since the second intifada began, four years ago. Violence, corruption, factionalism, and Israeli pressure have eroded the P.A. When a former American State Department official told Arafat last year that the P.A. was in danger of political ruin and financial bankruptcy, Arafat replied, "Let it collapse. It will be the fault of the Israelis and the Americans." More and more, the young leaders of the armed militant groups have been gaining stature as arbiters of the street, ignoring the P.A., and no potential Palestinian leader, not even Abbas, can easily control them. At the start of the campaign, fighters from Hamas and Islamic Jihad said that they would boycott the election. The leaders of the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades—a secular group, affiliated with Fatah, and, in recent years, no less violent than Hamas—circled around Abbas and heard him out, to see if he was worthy of their trust. Abbas seemed to be gaining their support, but it was contingent. In Jenin, a city north of Nablus, the leader of the Brigades is Zakaria Zbeida. Released from jail in 1994 under the Oslo accords, Zbeida has been the city's kingpin; he reportedly once torched the P.A.'s offices when it failed to find employment for some of his fighters. Zbeida, who survived a bomb that blew up in his face while he was assembling it, is wanted for his part in a variety of terror missions, including an ambush of Israeli voters at a polling place, which led to the deaths of six Israelis and two Palestinian gunmen. When Abbas visited Jenin on a campaign stop, he won a great victory. He was hoisted onto the shoulders of Zakaria Zbeida.

To give us a sense of how the armed men in Nablus saw the campaign, Nasrallah invited to the office a Brigades fighter named Abu Muhammad. He was dressed in a black watch cap, fatigues, combat boots, and a kaffiyeh. He was around thirty, muscular, neckless, like a bouncer; he wore a dark beard so short that it seemed almost painted on his jawline.

"I'm wanted by the Israelis," he announced as he sat down. "I've been shot by them three times."

When?

"I'm not good with dates."

Abu Muhammad picked up a pack of cigarettes, stripped off the cellophane, and tried to shake one loose. Under the table, his foot was tapping furiously, keeping time, it seemed, with his own anxiety. He glanced at the doorframe, checking on his bodyguard. Like all fighters in town, he was under Israeli surveillance and he knew it. There were informers to look out for, post-midnight incursions into Balata and the Casbah. Abu Muhammad slept in a different place every night.

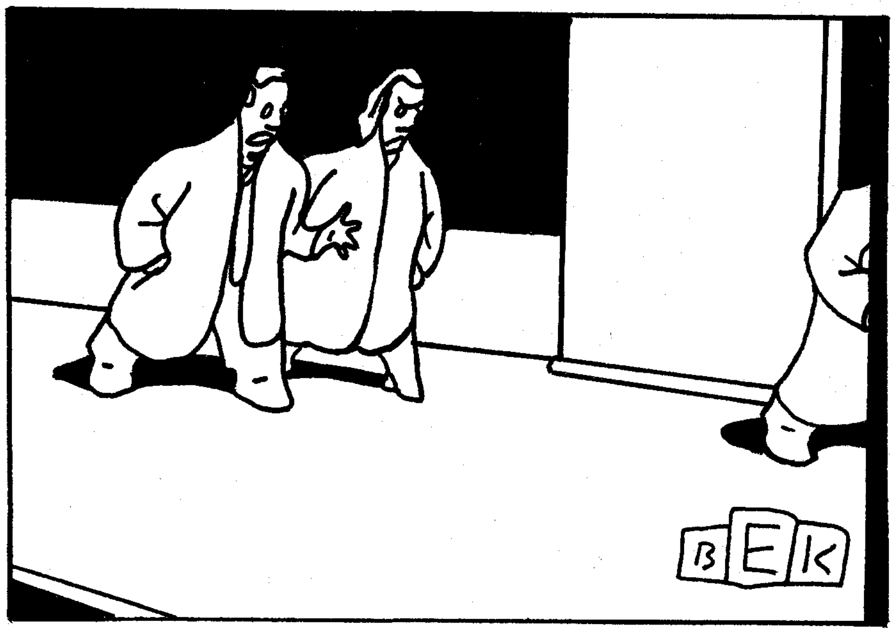
After a clumsy struggle, he finally freed one of the cigarettes. "We still have some activities attacking Israeli targets, but there are fewer of them," he said, lighting up. "We are waiting to see. The loss of Yasir Arafat has been great and we are waiting to see if the new situation fits or not. Why should we stop our operations when they still hunt us?. . . We have our reservations and conditions, but we'll vote for Abu Mazen. But we will not give up our rifles."

Someone asked if there was a Palestinian leader the armed men would have supported with real conviction. Abu Muhammad laughed.

"Of course, I prefer Marwan Barghouti," he said. "We call him the sheikh of our struggle."

When he was asked how long he was prepared to carry a gun, Muhammad said, "I'm a Fatah activist, but do you think I really want to do this? I was arrested in 1987, 1990, 1992. I had a ten-year sentence in 1992, but I was released in 1994 because of Oslo. Many of my closest friends are martyrs." His expression asked for sympathy, and the rhythm of his foot quickened. "I have three kids," he said. "Last week, I was called in to my daughter's school and, even though I was risking my life to go out in public like that, I went. The principal told me that my daughter was doing badly in school, that all she knows about is the names of the martyrs of the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades. And it's not only her. They all wear pictures of the martyrs in pendants around their necks, like amulets."

In the Casbah that night, there was an election rally, a sullen, sodden affair. Aluminum sheets were set up over the warren of shops, but still the rain leaked through. The rally was set for six, and for an hour I sat with a very small crowd listening to P.L.O. marching songs from the nineteen-sixties blare through a set of speakers. A few teen-agers with AK-47s walked up and down the aisles, heedless of the fact that the barrels were pointed



"There has to be room in the relationship for me to say I'm divorcing you."

at people's faces, at *my* face. Finally, the governor of Nablus, Mahmoud Aloul, arrived. He had a seigneurial air and wore a cashmere overcoat. In Lebanon and Tunis, he had been an assistant to Arafat's deputy, Abu Jihad, and a member of the military wing of Fatah. He'd lost a son in the intifada, I was told—"shot while throwing stones."

Someone turned off the fight songs and Aloul stepped up to the microphone to deliver a speech commemorating the fortieth anniversary of Fatah. We have lost Arafat, he began. "He gave us courage. He gave us inspiration." The panegyric lasted around fifteen minutes. The governor never mentioned the name Mahmoud Abbas.

The next morning, at his office, Aloul seemed surprised when I asked about the missing man in his speech.

"It wasn't really the point," he said. "The point was Fatah, the party." And then, like so many others, he said that Palestinian institutions, and not a single man, would now run the affairs of the Palestinian people. Mahmoud Abbas, he declared, was "an instrument of institutions."

"The Americans and the Israelis need to know that in order for Abu Mazen to succeed they have to give him something—free prisoners, lift the siege, help the economic situation," he said. "How can I tell a fighter, 'Don't fight,' when the Israelis are coming into the city to kill him?"

When Abbas came to Nablus a few days later, he delivered triumphant speeches in the refugee camp and at the university, and was followed around the city by a cheering procession. In the streets, many of the men closest to his side were armed commanders of the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades. At least for now, his rhetorical gambit was working.

The Middle East is a region of messages explosively delivered. In Gaza City several years ago, when Islamic radicals wanted to inform the secular community that alcohol was impermissible, they burned down the Windmill Hotel, where drinking was allowed. Message noted. Now it is nearly impossible to get a beer anywhere in Gaza.

During the campaign, Abbas was on the receiving end of similarly indelicate communications. In Gaza City, just after Abbas began his campaign, members of the Brigades fired off guns in a mourners' tent while he was visiting, a gesture that terrified the candidate and his aides. The message seemed clear—Abbas was under the threat of assassination—and it was received in an equally clear way: the leader of the faction that had done the shooting was quickly made a campaign manager. On days that Abbas spoke of the pitfalls of armed struggle, Hamas launched homemade rockets over the walls of Gaza; the people in the Israeli town of Sederot were also on the receiving end of these messages. Sharon's message was that Israel would not absorb attacks, no matter how minor: in retaliation for four mortars that nearly hit a school bus, an Israeli tank in Gaza fired on a group of teen-agers in a strawberry field. Seven died, six from one extended family. The young men had fired the mortars, the Israelis said; the Palestinians maintained they were farmworkers. The mother of three of the boys went out into the field to collect the body parts of her children.

"Luck, son, is when preparation meets nepotism."

As Abbas and his entourage moved from city to city, he tried to balance his own messages. He kept criticizing the intifada, though he was careful not to besmirch the martyrs themselves. And just when he seemed to be crossing a line, seeming too soft, too much Sharon's man, he let loose a rhetorical rocket of his own. When he heard about the Israeli tank attack, he gave a furious speech in Khan Yunis and referred to Israel as *al adu el-sahyuni*—"the Zionist enemy"—a term usually used by Hamas and its brethren organizations in Damascus and Tehran. Abbas is a man of calculation, and he knew the remark was intemperate.

Later, when he returned to his office in Ramallah at the *muqata*, Abbas invited in the most famous political columnist in Israel, Nahum Barnea, of the tabloid *Yediot Ahronot*, and the paper's senior correspondent, Ronny Shaked. Barnea, who lost a son in a bus bombing, and Shaked greeted Abbas wryly, saying, "*Ahlan*"—"hello"—"we are the Zionist enemy!"

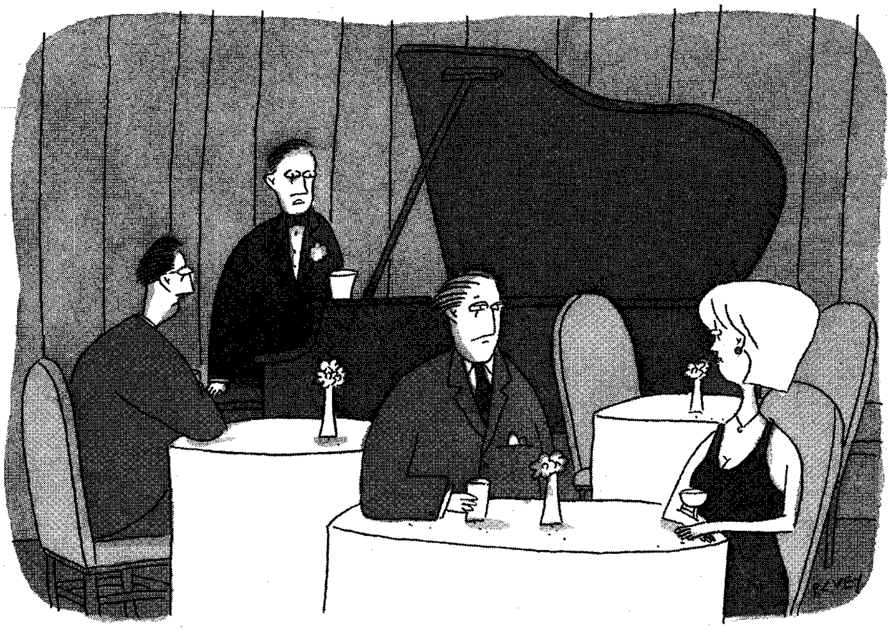
Abbas was apologetic. "When such a tragedy happens," he said, referring to the deadly mortar attack, "a person doesn't know what will come out of his mouth."

The campaign was full of indignities. In Rafah, the poorest, most lawless town in Gaza, Abbas was arriving at a campaign stop when someone in his entourage closed the car window on his right ring finger, chopping off the tip.

"I wrapped the finger in newspaper

and went to speak," he told Barnea and Shaked. "Only when the rally was over did I go to the hospital."

In the past, Abbas had said that Israel's military was capable of defeating "the Arab nation," all twenty-two states. And now he could not see why he was being criticized for being surrounded by men with AK-47s at nearly every campaign stop. "I do not understand why Israel is upset," he said. "Is it because they saw me being photographed with the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades? I met with the brigade people everywhere, and also with members of the other factions. We want to bring them all into the Palestinian framework. We will do this—on condition that Israel stops hunting them."



"I'd like to dedicate this next song to all those who thought they'd loved and lost only to find out years later that it was just some sort of scheduling conflict."

Mahmoud Abbas has spent much of his political life trying to balance the maximalism of party principle and the perils of negotiation. He has even been designated, at times, as a cleanup man for Arafat. In 1993, he was dispatched to Saudi Arabia to apologize for the P.L.O.'s support of Iraq in the Gulf War. Deeply knowledgeable about the debates among Zionist factions, he has been meeting with Israelis since the nineteen-seventies. He was a major presence at nearly every Palestinian negotiation with the Israelis since the thaw of the early nineties. The Arafat style was one of bluff, drama, flattery, purposeful contradiction, mystery, fog. Abbas is a logician, stern, arid. Yossi Beilin, the leader of the liberal Yahad Party, who spent countless hours in meetings with Abbas, has written that he is "diffident . . . realistic . . . pragmatic but not moderate."

Some liberal politicians in Israel, including those who have known Abbas for many years, told me that his orthodox statements on the refugee issue, for example, were merely a political necessity, and that, in the end, he was a leader prepared to take risks in order to achieve a two-state solution, Israel and Palestine as neighbors. "Abu Mazen resembles the successor to Fidel Castro," Beilin told me one evening in Tel Aviv. "Now, I haven't met Fidel's successor yet, but I know that he won't have the fatigues or the big cigar and he won't give seven-hour speeches.

"Abu Mazen is the natural successor to Arafat," he went on. "He was No. 2 in the P.L.O., so he is not an imposed leader. He's been there in Tunis and the territories. In an embryonic state, this is important. Plus, he's well liked in the Arab world. He has connections in the Gulf, Kuwait, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Russia."

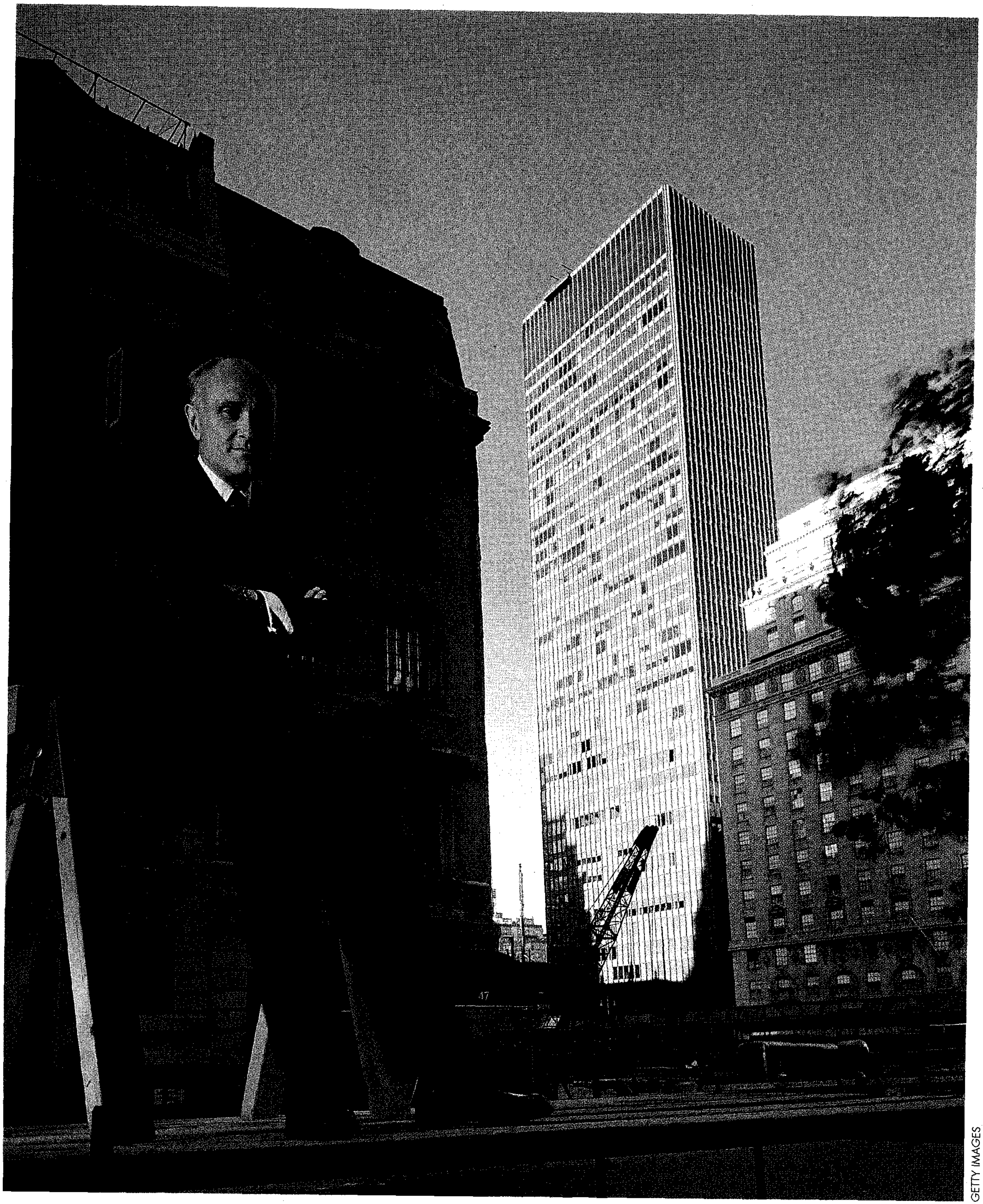
Abbas is a devout Muslim, though he is adamantly secular in his politics. He has two sons, one who is a wealthy businessman. A third son died of a heart attack in 2002. Abbas has never carried a gun, never fought in a battle, aboveground or underground. One unsettling element in his past is his putative career as a part-time scholar. In the early nineteen-eighties, Abbas completed a doctoral dissertation at the Institute of Oriental Studies, in Moscow, about the alleged negotiations between some Zionist leaders and the Nazis for the relocation of German Jews to Palestine in exchange for their property. In 1984, Abbas published a version of his dissertation in Amman as a book entitled "The Other Side: The Secret Relationship Between the Nazis and the Zionist Movement." (The Israeli documentary group MEMRI has on file a copy of both the dissertation, in Russian, and the book, in Arabic.) The dissertation is written in a near-parodic Soviet style; the prologue endlessly, and irrelevantly, quotes the collected works of V. I. Lenin. In the book version, Abbas casts doubt on the scope of the Holocaust:

> During World War II, forty million people of various nations of the world were killed. The German people lost ten million; the Soviet people twenty million; and the rest were from Yugoslavia, Poland, and other peoples. But after the war it was publicized that six million Jews were among the victims, and that the war of annihilation had been aimed first of all against the Jews, and only then against the rest of the peoples of Europe. The truth of the matter is that no one can verify this number. Or completely deny it. In other words, the number of Jewish victims might be six million and might be much smaller—even less than one million. But a discussion regarding the number of Jews does not in any way diminish the atrocity of the crime committed against them because the killing of a human being—any human being—is a crime that the civilized world cannot accept and humanity cannot comprehend. . . . It seems that the interest of the Zionist movement was to inflate the number of murdered in the war so as to insure greater gains. This is what led it to confirm this figure, and to instill it in world public opinion, and by doing so, to arouse more pangs of conscience and sympathy for Zionism in general.

Abbas cites the research of Robert Faurisson, a French Holocaust denier, to the effect that Jews were not killed in gas chambers at Auschwitz. The dissertation is an ugly work and can hardly be dismissed as a youthful indiscretion: Abbas was in his late forties when it was

POSTSCRIPT

SHAPE-SHIFTER


GETTY IMAGES

Philip Johnson in Manhattan, in June, 1959, with the Seagram Building looming behind him. Photograph by Arnold Newman.

In 1959, the Seagram Building was a shimmering new presence amid the stolid masonry of Park Avenue, but Philip Johnson, who designed the glass tower with Mies van der Rohe, was already established as America's champion of modernism. Johnson had been an architect for only a little more than a decade when he heeded Mies's call to help design the Seagram, but before he entered architecture school, at the age of thirty-four, he had started the department of architecture at the Museum of Modern Art, written "The International Style," with Henry-Russell Hitchcock, and curated several exhibitions that forced modern design into American cultural consciousness.

Johnson, who died last week, at the age of ninety-eight, didn't stay with the style of the Seagram. He was intellectually restless, and new ideas interested him more than consistency. And, while he produced his share of distinguished buildings—such as the Transco Tower, in Houston—his greatest piece of architecture was the transcendent compound that he designed for himself, the Glass House, in New Canaan, Connecticut. It eventually grew into a series of eight structures, each an experiment in a style that had aroused his passion.

The residence was a metaphor for his real life's work, which was defining the trajectory of architectural culture. He held court at Table No. 32 at the Four Seasons restaurant—one of his most elegant designs, on the ground floor of the Seagram Building—a banquette where he could reliably be found at lunch sipping a Campari cocktail. There were also dinners at the Century Club and gatherings at the Glass House, where a constant parade of architects and critics aired their latest views, and Johnson proclaimed new styles and propounded theories. Indeed, his buildings were merely responses to the ideas that excited him most.

—*Paul Goldberger*

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published. His subsequent explanations ring hollow. When a reporter for the Israeli newspaper *Ma'ariv* asked Abbas about his book, he replied, "When I wrote 'The Other Side,' in 1982, we were at war with Israel. Today, I would not have made such remarks." And, to *Ha'aretz*, he said that his work had been misunderstood, that the Holocaust was a "terrible, unforgivable crime against the Jewish nation."

Although Abbas and every other Palestinian continue to speak of an agreement that would provide a state contained by the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the capital, and a compromise on refugees and the control of holy places, the Israeli political élite is operating in a different universe. Talk of an all-at-once settlement, like the one attempted by the Labor Prime Minister Ehud Barak at Camp David in 2000, is long past. Sharon has radically altered the terms of discussion and, at the same time, presented himself as the only figure able to move forward. In the same way that only de Gaulle could call on France to leave Algeria, or only Nixon could go to China, it is said, only Sharon can leave Gaza and dismantle settlements. Where the Labor Party failed, Sharon could, in his own, halting way, succeed.

The skeptical view (among some liberal Israelis and nearly all Palestinians) is that Sharon has not changed at all, and that to entertain such a notion is wishful thinking; rather, he is ceding Gaza only as a way to end a pointless and expensive occupation and, at the same time, to continue to perforate the map of the West Bank so thoroughly with Jewish settlements that it will be possible to give up no more than half the territory to any future Palestinian entity. "The real obstacle to peace has always been Sharon and the collusion between Bush and Sharon," Hanan Ashrawi, the Palestinian negotiator, said. "This unilateral engagement serves Sharon, it gives him maximum demographic advantage and minimal geographic loss, it gives the impression of a political plan and negates the Palestinian side, undermining a Palestinian state. You are still an occupier, even if from a distance."

The opposite view (and there are many Israelis who hold it) is that it does not really matter what Sharon intends. He is not a young man, and if he successfully gives up Gaza, and the Palestinians are able to stifle suicide bombings and rocket attacks, and the Americans keep pushing the Road Map . . . well, more concessions will come. It is a future with none of the idealism of the Oslo days or the brinkmanship of Camp David, but it is a future. One of Sharon's Deputy Prime Ministers in the coalition government, the Labor leader Shimon Peres, told me that disengagement is a "very mediocre plan," but he was somehow more comfortable with Sharon's tactics than with Barak's attempt to leap over the abyss at Camp David. "Maybe Sharon hopes in his heart that he can get away with just Gaza. It doesn't matter," Peres said. "Facts are stronger than leaders. And the same will happen in the West Bank, even, for him, in the best conditions. There is a change. A few years ago, the idea that the Likud would talk about a Palestinian state—well, you'd have to be crazy. And here they are. They have given up the idea of Greater Israel. . . . Labor lost in actions, but we won in ideology. Sharon now speaks our language."

The Palestinians, like the Israelis, have lived with Ariel Sharon ever since the rise of the Israeli state, when the young commander was a protégé of David Ben-Gurion, the leader of the Mapai Party and the state's founding figure. Although Sharon heads the Likud Party, which inherited Vladimir Jabotinsky's "Revisionist" yearning for Greater Israel—Menachem Begin came to power in 1977 under this banner—the Prime Minister is not a creature of steadfast ideology.

Part of the reason that Sharon can garner such widespread support for disengagement is the brutality of his biography. In the calculus of Israeli politics, no one can accuse him of being soft on the Palestinians. "Sharon is a man who knows only two states of mind," the Israeli political philosopher Avishai Margalit has written—"fighting and preparing for fighting." He is remembered both for his daring and for his ruthlessness. After serving in the 1947-48 War of Independence, Sharon became part of the legendary Unit 101 in the early nineteen-fifties, which carried out cross-border raids against fighters in Egypt and Jordan. Sharon led the attack on the

Jordanian village of Kibbiya, in which more than forty houses were demolished, some with the families still inside. Sixty-nine people were killed, most of them women and children. As Minister of Defense under Begin, he was already the architect of the settlements program in the West Bank and Gaza and was the principal aggressor in the Lebanon war, ordering the Army to keep pushing north to Beirut. An independent Israeli panel, the Kahan Commission, determined that Sharon bore both "indirect responsibility" and "personal responsibility" for the slaughter by Christian Phalangists, while the Israeli military stood by, of hundreds of Palestinian men, women, and children in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps. As a politician, Sharon has never shown a shred of faith in even the most benign deal with the Arabs. In 1994, when the Knesset was nearly unanimous in approving a peace treaty with Jordan, Sharon abstained.

Ben-Gurion was both seduced and made anxious by Sharon, calling him "an original, visionary young man. . . . Were he to rid himself of his faults of not speaking the truth and to distance himself from gossip, he would be an exceptional military leader." Ben-Gurion's successors were even more astringent in their judgment. Golda Meir called Sharon a "danger to democracy" and, a decade later, Begin said that Sharon was capable of surrounding the Knesset with tanks. Even the settlers, who were his beneficiaries, were wary of him. When Israel and Egypt made peace, a quarter century ago, and Israel withdrew from Sinai, it was Sharon who took on the job of dismantling Yamit, the main settlement there.

Sharon, like any other head of state, is surrounded by aides and ministers, but his closest advisers hold no official post; perhaps the closest of all is his son Omri, a legislator in his late thirties, who seems to run his father's political operation from his cell phone. (Sharon's other son, Gilad, runs the family farm—said to be the largest private farm in Israel.) Bald, corpulent, cynical, and funny, Omri works his beat like a Chicago alderman, wheedling, pleading, trading, intimidating. At a small dinner in Tel Aviv one night—Omri had four platefuls of osso buco and loudly sucked the marrow from the bones—I listened to him describe how his father would sway a particularly recalcitrant rabbi in his nineties to support the governing coalition. "Everything can be done," Omri explained.

"Sharon doesn't trust anybody," Yossi Beilin told me. "He doesn't trust Likud, he doesn't trust Labor, he doesn't trust the Europeans or the British or even Bush, not the left or the extreme right. He depends on his sons, which is indicative of a paranoid person. Omri, a backbencher in the Knesset, is the director general of the country. It's unbelievable. Omri's importance is unhealthy. Israel remains a stable democracy, but it's unbelievable."

Even as early as 2001, Sharon introduced the vague notion that his country would eventually have to make "painful concessions." But, rather than get into specifics and risk the rejection of his own party, he used a deputy—in this case, the Deputy Prime Minister Ehud Olmert—to inflate a trial balloon, in December, 2003, and let it float.

Olmert, a smart and cocky politician who was the mayor of Jerusalem before joining the Cabinet, told me how, in December of 2003, on the thirtieth anniversary of Ben-Gurion's death, Sharon had been scheduled to speak near the burial place. The night before, however, Sharon called Olmert and said he was sick, asking if Olmert could fill in for him. Olmert comes from an old Revisionist family, which resented Ben-Gurion for agreeing to the United Nations partition of Palestine, in 1947, and for ordering Israeli soldiers in 1948 to fire on the cargo ship Altalena, which was carrying a huge arms cache and rebel fighters loyal to Menachem Begin. But if Olmert was still ambivalent about Ben-Gurion he was loyal to Sharon. He quickly agreed to give the speech. Sharon faxed Olmert a draft. The key passage quoted Ben-Gurion as saying that the Israelis "could have conquered" far more territory, but "Then what?" That state "would hold elections and we'd be in the minority. When we faced the choice of the complete land without a Jewish state, or a Jewish state without the complete land, we chose a Jewish state."

For Revisionist ideologues who believed in a Greater Israel, such pragmatism was still, a half century later, a heresy. And when Olmert read it at the ceremony the reaction was swift. "When I finished my speech, and I sat down," Olmert told me, "the speaker of the Knesset"—a Likud ideologue, Reuven Rivlin—"looked at me almost with tears and said, 'This is a disaster, this is the end. The end of Likud, the end of what we have been fighting for.' " (Rivlin, for his part, told me later in his office at the Knesset that he was indeed "heartbroken" to hear that his close friend, speaking in Sharon's name, had betrayed the principles of Jabotinsky, Begin, and Greater Israel.) A year later, when Sharon gave the memorial speech himself and echoed the same themes, Olmert concluded that Sharon had made his shift, in part, to deflect attention from a campaign-finance scandal and because of pressure from the United States and the Europeans, who needed to see a show of progress somewhere in the Middle East.

Olmert said, "You ask me today, Do I believe that Judea and Samaria"—the Biblical names for the West Bank—"are the historical land of the Palestinians? Nonsense. There never was any Palestinian nation that lived there, there never was a clear, well-defined ethnic group that has created a national life other than the Jews. There were tribes, there were individuals, there were families, whatever. And most of the territories were rather empty. So, from a historic point of view, you can argue very strongly against the Palestinian claim. But what difference does it make? At the end of the day, there are five million Palestinians between the Jordan and the sea. This is the most fundamental fact."

Olmert, like everyone I spoke to in Sharon's circle, said that the boundaries that every mainstream Palestinian politician insists on for a final settlement—the 1967 borders—are "off the table." "But that doesn't mean that there will not be modifications," he said, lighting up a Cuban cigar. "For me, forever, these are parts of Israel. But maybe we will be forced to pull out from parts of Israel. Because we have to make a choice between Greater Israel and a Jewish democratic state. Why? Because I believe that in another ten years the entire setup will change. It will cease to be an Algerian-type conflict, and it will be a South African-type conflict. Algerian in the sense that this is entirely a confrontation between two nations. In a South African situation, [the Arabs] will say, O.K., we want Greater Israel, one person, one vote. The day that will be the main narrative, we've lost the game. It will become a Palestinian state with a majority of Palestinians with Palestinian government and a Palestinian leadership and Palestinian right of return, by a choice of the majority of the people in a democratic vote. What will we do then?"

I asked whether he thought Sharon's disengagement plan—no matter what the motive—would rescue his historical reputation abroad.

Olmert relit his cigar and slowly exhaled, his head nearly encased in smoke. "Who will remember Sabra and Shatila after the disengagement? Well, some Jewish historians!" He laughed and then puffed on his cigar. "Look," he said, "the world will finally focus on the main thing. This is the story of history, and you know it. Do you know how many flaws Churchill had before he became the historic figure of the twentieth century? Who remembers it now? This is a historic move by Sharon. I will have a footnote, but he will have the main chapter."

Sharon's offices are unimpressive—except for the security detail, which has multiplied since the Rabin assassination, a decade ago. The sense of threat has only increased. Two senior Israeli intelligence officials told me that they are worried for the lives of both Mahmoud Abbas and Ariel Sharon. "It's tense," one of them said. "We have reason to believe Hamas is trying to launch an assassination of Abu Mazen. And, within Israel, extremists"—especially among the settlers in the occupied territories—"understand that the removal of Sharon is the only thing that might stop disengagements."

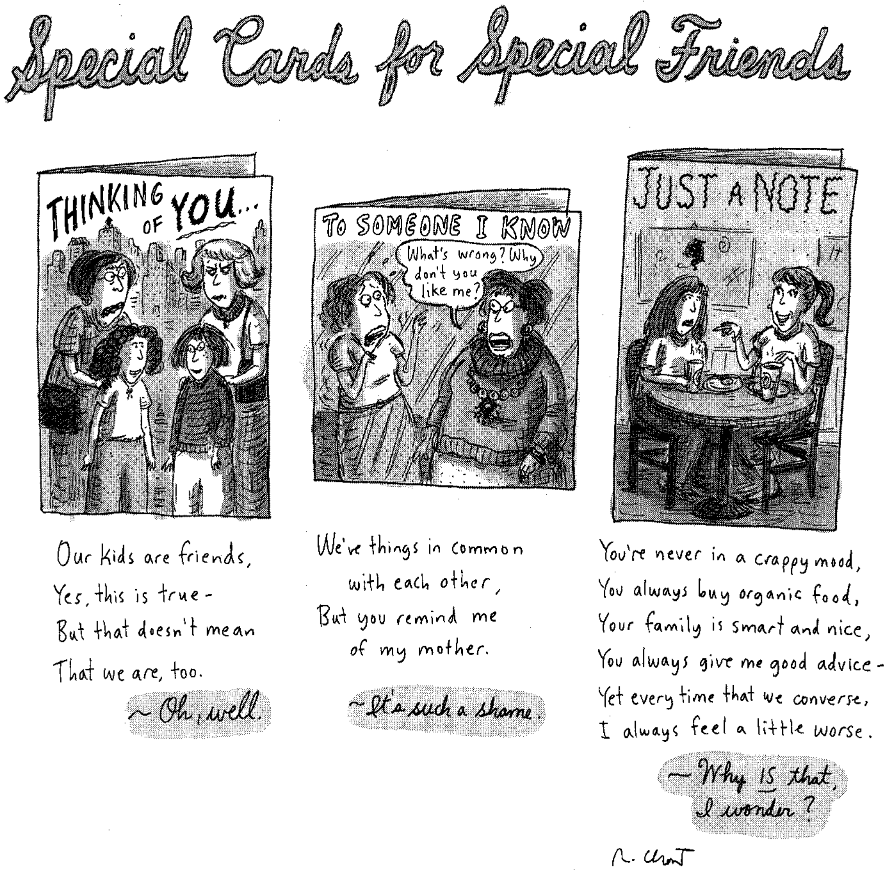
Last fall, with the appearance in *Ha'aretz* of Dov Weissglas's indiscreet comments about using disengagement to put any further negotiations in "formaldehyde," Sharon and his circle were enraged, and since then his aides have been wary about speaking on the record. And yet they spoke, at least anonymously. One of Sharon's senior advisers took me into an office near the Prime Minister's and told me that everything now depended on Abbas's ability to stop terror. Sharon, he said, saw September 11, 2001, as the moment when the American Administration began to understand terror principally as ideological aggression that must be stopped at all costs.

"The European political vision was the other way around," the senior adviser said. "They saw terror as a by-product of political frustration. Not that the Europeans support terror. But in the European dialectic, unlike the American, terror is the natural outcome. From our intimate knowledge of the region for one hundred and ten years—which is when the major Jewish migration began—we have a different understanding of political terrorism. The rules are different in the Middle East.

"The problem now between us and the Palestinians," he went on, "is not the substance of the solution but the ability to implement it. Even if the Palestinians had gotten the 1947 territory, not that of 1967, even if all the refugees could come back, even if they got all of Jerusalem, not just a divided Jerusalem, what would happen the next day? There is not one person in the Palestinian Authority who is capable of turning to his people and saying, 'The game is now over,' the way Ben-Gurion did in 1948 on thirty per cent of the land we have now. He was able to face down his opposition, including Menachem Begin, and say, 'Go to hell.' And the state was founded."

Sharon's adviser said it was understood that Abbas could not quash absolutely every terrorist, but the effort had to be impressive. "We at least want to see the Palestinians arrest them, kick the shit out of them, not welcome them like heroes," he said. After a while, the adviser and a press secretary took me across the hall to see the Prime Minister.

Sharon is seventy-six and alarmingly overweight. He seemed impatient, tired. Up the hill from his compound, near the Knesset, settlers from all over the occupied territories had set up a tent village and had been demonstrating, day after day, against disengagement. They waved orange banners and handed out bumper stickers and T-shirts that read, "The People Are with Gush Katif." A very few from the Gush Katif settlements, in Gaza, wore orange stars, as symbols of their victimhood and as an echo of the


Special Cards for Special Friends
THINKING OF YOU...
Our kids are friends,
Yes, this is true -
But that doesn't mean
That we are, too.
~ Oh, well.
TO SOMEONE I KNOW
What's wrong? Why don't you like me?
We've things in common
with each other,
But you remind me
of my mother.
~ It's such a shame.
JUST A NOTE
You're never in a crappy mood,
You always buy organic food,
Your family is smart and nice,
You always give me good advice -
Yet every time that we converse,
I always feel a little worse.
— Why IS that, I wonder?
R. Chast

yellow Stars of David that Jews were made to wear under the Nazis. Most thought the symbol an outrage. Some settlers were talking about mass protests to block the disengagement this summer; already there had been clashes in the West Bank between soldiers and settlers when a tiny outpost—just two trailer homes—was disbanded. Privately, Sharon was said to be furious, but he was careful to show only sympathy.

“They are leaving their homes,” he told me. “The disengagement plan is a heavy burden. It is painful for them and painful for me. But we have to do it.”

Sharon was not ready to talk about concessions beyond Gaza. He had always said that it was necessary to have settlement outposts in the Jordan River Valley as a defensive plan against Jordan and Iraq—the Eastern Front—but now Saddam was in jail and the Jordanians had a long-standing treaty with Israel. Couldn’t those settlements go? I asked Sharon.

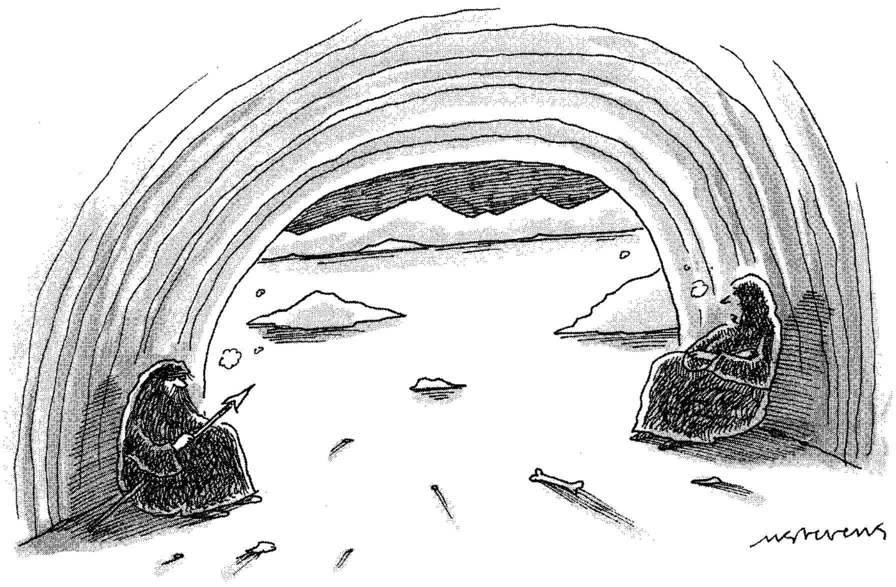
“We just don’t know,” he said. “When you are dealing with security in a tiny country, you have to look to the future, and the Jordan Valley is very important. We don’t know how things will develop with Iran or Iraq or Syria. We have to be very careful.”

When we spoke, the election was just a few days away. Abbas was performing well, almost transformed. He seemed to be gaining a taste for oratory, and his poll ratings were rising. Sharon’s critics were saying that he might have been the only person in the Middle East who missed Arafat, because now he would have to deal with a democratically elected antagonist and negotiating partner.

“As a Jew, the most important thing for me is the historic possibility to secure the Jewish people,” Sharon said. “In this part of the world, declarations, promises, proposals, even signatures are one thing. Only acts are serious. It’s not a matter of if I trust the Arabs. Only acts can be taken seriously. And they have to dismantle terror organizations, collect their weapons. They have to do it, not promise it.”

Sharon said that the disengagement from Gaza would be just a first step in reëngaging the Palestinians in a negotiating process, so long as the new head of the Palestinian Authority made a concerted effort to take guns and explosives out of the hands of Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades. “I know Abu Mazen, I know him well,” he said. “I’ve met him here many times. He has to dismantle terror organizations and fight terror. He has to see the Palestinians be fully committed to the cessation of terror. . . . We will be watching what happens.”

Sharon relied on bromides, and his attention seemed fixed on the schedule typed out on a sheet of paper before him—the one piece of paper on his desk. But then, just before I left, he stood and, like an expert thespian trying to make a pronouncement seem improvised, the product of passion and sudden thought, he said, “When it comes to security, I will never make compromises. Never! Not as long as I’m here. And I have no plans to leave anytime soon.”



“Is it cold in here or is it just the Ice Age?”

The Israeli settlers—more than seven thousand in Gaza, approximately a quarter of a million in the West Bank—do not all share a common ideology. Some of the larger, more established settlements around Jerusalem and Tel Aviv resemble bedroom communities in the farthest commuting reaches of Phoenix or Los Angeles. People moved there not for messianic reasons but because the government encouraged them, gave them breaks on housing, on taxes. Some even vote Labor. However, the vast majority of settlers are politically right wing, and, as in all politics, the most persistently newsworthy are the sanctimonious, the paranoiacs, the cranks, the dangerous. There are plenty of settlers outside Hebron, Nablus, and Jenin who see themselves as soldiers of Greater Israel, soldiers of God—some of the most radical are called the “hilltop youth”—and Israeli intelligence officials told me they fear that some fanatics might go well beyond civil disobedience in order to put a halt to Sharon’s plan to dismantle the Gaza settlements this summer. In a Knesset committee meeting, Avi Dichter, the head of the Shabak, Israel’s equivalent of the F.B.I., said that a few dozen extremist settlers are likely to spread rumors that Army snipers are going to fire on settlers in order to goad them into firing back and cause an all-out battle. Dichter said that he had to be concerned both about Palestinian militants obtaining anti-aircraft missiles via tunnels dug under the Egyptian border and about Jewish settlers stealing weapons from Israeli military garrisons. “The Gaza Strip could become southern Lebanon,” he said.

The principal leadership of the settlers, the Yesha Council, had issued a proclamation calling on supporters in Israel and abroad to gather around the settlers in Gaza and “disobey this Transfer Law and be prepared in large numbers to pay the price of going to prison.” The document, written by Pinchas Wallerstein, the head of the Binyamin regional council, and distributed in all the settlements and on the Internet, said that disengagement was “an immoral under-

LAST LOVE

For years I chose the man to suit the instant,
from good guy to goat boy.
Not one could bridal me. In place of lace veil,
I peered from bandage gauze.
And if, in rage, some suitor tore that off, the red sun
was a scald, and I felt scalped
and rocket-shot onto the nearest flight. So everyone
I kissed left hurt. One man
broke the table I served him bread on.
Another claimed my heart
was arsenic at its core. When my last love came,
he slid a palm across
mine eyes, lent me his mouth (a bitten
plum), lay his head
in the middle of me, bent me
to that. Nights now,
my face rests on the meadow of his chest—
so I'm a loose-petalled poppy
blown open, a girl again, for the last time
hearing the earth's heartbeat.

—*Mary Karr*

taking." The tone was desperate, self-righteous: "Were Martin Luther King to be alive today to witness the singling out of Jewish residents as Jews for expulsion from their homes, perhaps he might point out that his constituency was similarly singled out to be prevented from being present in schools, restaurants, and, yes, neighborhoods."

One morning, a public-relations executive named Aliza Herbst picked me up at my hotel in Jerusalem in a bulletproof van to take me to see Wallerstein. Herbst is a serious woman in her fifties who, as we drove north into the West Bank, compared her commitment to living in a settlement to the counterculture life she led in the sixties at the University of Wisconsin. "My husband was involved in the environment and was in on the first Earth Day," she said. "That's where the idealism came from." We were driving along the main spine of the West Bank, Route 60, past Arab villages and Jewish settlements, past sections of the wall. The complexity of the geography, its security lines, has been made preposterously complicated by the Israeli government in the past thirty-seven years. We detoured off the main road and up a hill to a small settlement called Migron, a collection of a few dozen trailers surrounded by a fence and barbed wire. It seemed like a dubious place to live, on top of a bare and windy hill, surrounded by nothing but Arab villages and Biblical memories. There were no stores, no theatres—just the trailer homes. Herbst did not see it that way. "It's like summer camp," she said. "What could be bad?"

We arrived in Pesagot, a much larger Jewish settlement that overlooks Ramallah. Wallerstein has his office here. Herbst, who lives in the nearby settlement of Ofra, got out of the van and said that it was clear to her that the Gaza disengagement would lead "inevitably" to the end of Ofra, the end of Pesagot, and she was, in her own way, ready to resist. "Pinchas is saying, 'Wake up! This is really happening,' " she said. "I have a right to be here, just like you have a right to be in New Mexico or Tennessee."

Wallerstein greeted us in his office. He is balding and wears a large knit *kipa*—a variety of skullcap that, in the arcane language of Israeli headgear, indicates a religious nationalist—and he walks with a limp, the result of a wound from the 1967 war. Wallerstein showed me a small hole in one of his telephones and another in his window frame—the result, he said, of sniper fire from a nearby Arab village. Wallerstein is one of the founding fathers of the settler movement. A former biology teacher, he moved to Ofra in 1975 and became an officer in the Gush Emunim (Bloc of the Faithful) and later a member of the Yesha Council.

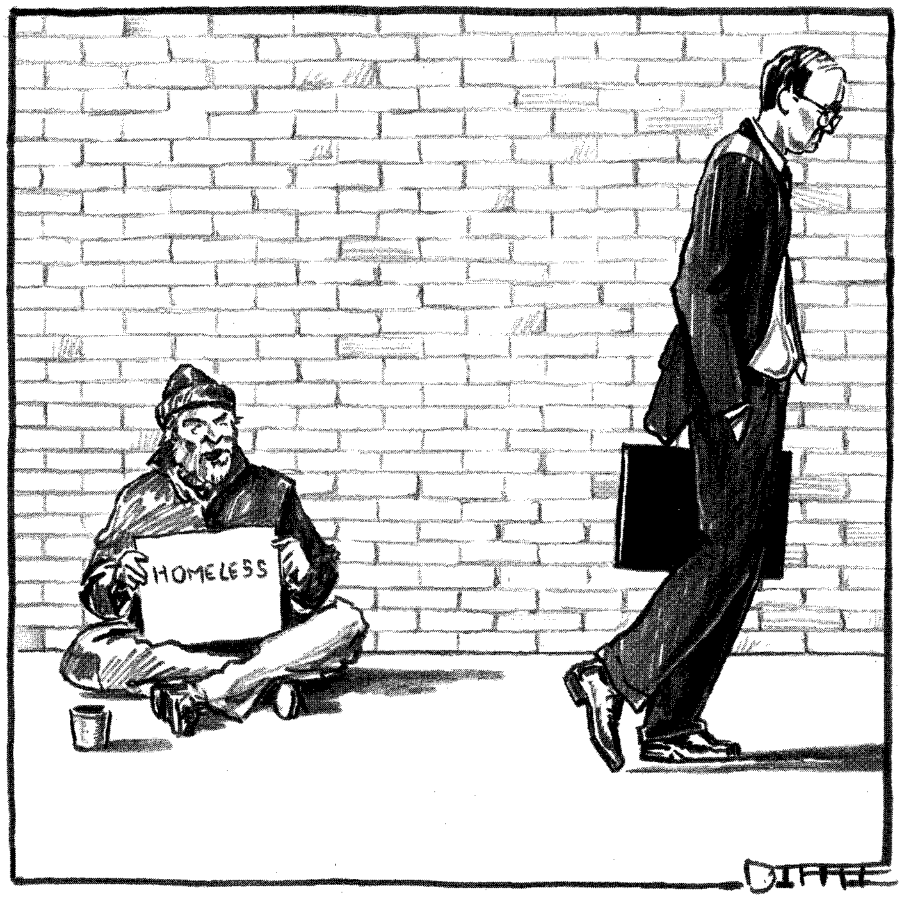
As we spoke, Wallerstein periodically checked his e-mail. Ever since he published his call for passive resistance against the disengagement from Gaza, he has been getting thousands of messages from all over the world, nearly all supportive, and no small number of them calling for sterner measures. He swivelled the computer screen around to let me see a message he'd just called up: "ANY METHOD IS LEGITIMATE TO PROTECT AGAINST THE ACTION THAT SHARON WANTS TO TAKE."

Wallerstein has known the Prime Minister for decades. They worked together on mapping out new settlements when Sharon was in Begin's Cabinet, but now, even though Wallerstein is careful with his language, it is clear that he feels he has been betrayed. He implied that Sharon had "changed" after the death of his wife, Lily, in 2000, that he was trying to sanitize his historical reputation abroad.

Unlike some of the settlers, Wallerstein said that he did not favor the old absolutist solution to the Palestinian problem—forced transfer of the Arab population to Jordan. But, for him, a two-state solution, whether along the 1967 borders or in the vastly more limited, interim sense propounded by Sharon's allies, was still unthinkable.

I asked him how long he thought the Palestinians would tolerate living in islets of territory surrounded by troops, checkpoints, and Jewish settlements, and whether he imagined a Bantustan arrangement, like in South Africa under apartheid. Wallerstein was not offended by the analogy. "Bantustans? Maybe. If you want to be honest, the problem is not just the Arabs in Judea and Samaria. It's the Arabs throughout the country. The part that is hardest to swallow about the withdrawal from Gaza is that it is not being done for peace. The potential to attack Israel will now increase."

He resented that the settlers were becoming increasingly isolated from the



"Hobophobe!"

• •

rest of Israel, that now even Sharon's supporters, not just traditional liberals, saw them as obstinate, potentially dangerous, inhabitants of another state, "the Settler state."

"It's easier to paint the world in black-and-white, so it's better if a settler has horns growing out of his head and has a knife between his teeth," Wallerstein said. "Otherwise you may have to deal with complicated questions of history and morality. I believe that I am part of the Zionist movement, which began establishing facts on the ground one hundred years ago."

On election day, I went to Gaza. The main entrance into the Strip, the Erez crossing, has been a fairly sleepy scene in recent years. Tens of thousands of Palestinian workers used to cross into Israel every morning and work as farmhands, factory workers, and domestic staff, and then return home in the evening. A crossing often took two or three hours. Unemployment may be as much as seventy per cent in Gaza, and the salaries for work in Israel were a relative fortune: twenty to fifty dollars a day. During the second intifada, however, the Israelis virtually cut off this daily migration and decided that they could make do with cheap labor from Southeast Asia.

Even on an easy day, when there have been no bombings, it takes about an hour to pass through all the controls and walk the long outdoor corridor to get to the other side. It is a severe passage: on one side, rich, green farmland and smooth highways and strip malls; on the other, cheap, crowded housing, sewage in the streets, honking and dust, and the ubiquitous posters extolling the martyrdom of teen-agers who have been sent into Israel as suicide bombers. Walking along the concrete corridor, I noticed an enormous hole in the wall and the metal roof. "There was a bomber in here last week," someone said.

It was a Sunday. Voters were arriving at polling stations all over Gaza, lining up, marking their ballots, and leaving with purple ink on their thumbs as an indication of having voted. Celebrity observers—Jimmy Carter, Joseph Biden, John Kerry—were in East Jerusalem and the more accessible towns of the West Bank, but there were few complaints.

"This could be a new era," Ziad Abu-Amr, the Palestinian legislator, said. "What's interesting about the way the campaign has gone in the past few weeks is that the front-runner did not take his success for granted. There was real anxiety in the inner circles. Arafat never feared elections; he was never worried about the result and never really bothered to campaign. Abu Mazen had to become popular in a short period of time. The anxiety in Fatah was whether he could be popular enough."

Political figures like Abu-Amr will play a crucial role in Gaza in the months to come; he has long been a conduit for Fatah to the leadership of Hamas. Until the targeted assassinations of Hamas leaders, among them Sheikh Yassin, in the past two years, the group was tightly organized, using its social-services facilities, its mosques, and its reputation for incorruptibility as effective recruitment tools. Now much of the decision-making has shifted to Khaled Mashal, the Hamas leader in Damascus. Abu-Amr said there was no secrecy surrounding Hamas's decision not to run an opponent against Abbas. "Even if a Hamas candidate won," he said, "he'd either have to negotiate with Israel or declare all-out war with Israel, and Hamas cannot afford that choice." Better to boycott the election and not run the risk of demystifying Hamas.

One of the few senior Hamas leaders left in Gaza, it seemed, was a physician named Mahmoud al-Zahar, whom I'd interviewed before the intifada reached its peak. At that time, Zahar met fairly regularly with journalists, dispensing the usual slogans of Islamist absolutism, conspiracy theories, and threats to the Israeli state. In September, 2003, an Israeli F-16 dropped a bomb on his house, killing his eldest son and badly injuring his wife. Zahar, who was not seriously wounded, has been underground ever since.

Some colleagues and I made an appointment to see Zahar at around midnight at the Ramattan television studios in Gaza City. He'd clearly made the calculation that this was one day when the Israelis would leave him alone.

We arrived at the studios and watched on a monitor as Abbas accepted the good news in Ramallah. He had won around sixty-two per cent of the vote. "In the name of God," he told his supporters, "this victory is for the soul of Yasir Arafat! . . . It's also a gift for the Palestinian people from Rafah to Jenin. Also for the souls of the martyrs and wounded and the eleven thousand prisoners in Israeli jails! They are all celebrating this victory with you now! . . . Also the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades are welcoming you!"

Down the hall, someone was coughing significantly. "Um . . . Mr. Zahar will see you."

Zahar welcomed us into a dingy studio. He was stouter than I'd remembered, sallow, with dark rings under his eyes. He closed his eyes wearily and nodded by way of greeting and started off by finding fault with the elections, about the fact that the polling day had been extended by two hours to give Abbas better turnout figures. "We were looking for a clean process," he complained.

We could still hear Abbas speaking on the monitor outside.

"Our attitude to Abu Mazen depends first of all on his attitude to the Palestinian factions and the resistance movements," Zahar said. "Disarming the military units in Fatah, Hamas, and Islamic Jihad will create an internal Palestinian military confrontation. No one will give him a chance to do that. . . . Hamas will never allow Abu Mazen to take our guns while there is still Israeli aggression. These soldiers are here to protect the Palestinians. If Abu Mazen attacks Hamas and denounces our national rights"—and here his tone grew threatening—"he'll lose a great deal."

In other words, there was only one language that Sharon or any other Israeli understood. "Why did Israel leave southern Lebanon and not the Golan Heights? Because there was effective armed struggle," Zahar said. "Why is Sharon leaving Gaza? Because armed struggle became too costly for the Israelis. . . . We don't trust them. Mahmoud Abbas is going to talk to them. But these people can't be trusted."

All this was to be expected. More interesting was that Hamas, which has always maintained an absolutist position—Israel cannot be permitted on Arab lands—had circulated a document to Fatah saying that it might be prepared to work jointly with Fatah for a two-state solution along the 1967 lines. It was hard to know how seriously to take this development. "If you leave Gaza and stop the aggression, we can give a *hudna*, a long *hudna*," Zahar said, using the Arabic word for "truce." "The P.L.O. was in a hurry. They recognized Israel without getting anything. They depended on the good will of the Israelis. If we got the West Bank, Gaza, and Jerusalem"—meaning East Jerusalem as a capital—"I could see a *hudna* for ten years. Maybe even longer than that. But we are not trusting the Israelis."

I mentioned that Israeli intelligence and some Palestinian commentators were concerned that Hamas might take the most extreme measures if it could not reach an accommodation with the new leader of the Palestinian Authority. Zahar glared and said, "Abu Mazen should have no fear from Hamas. We have a religious faith that does not allow us to kill an innocent man."

Walk around the neighborhoods of Gaza and it is hard to believe that Abbas can stifle terror either quickly or completely—not when a culture of martyrdom and its glorification has taken such root. The Martyrs' Cemetery. Martyr posters. Martyr cards. Martyr T-shirts. Martyr videotapes. One day, I passed by the Maslam Martyr Pharmacy. This distortion of identity is a crisis as great as politics. In the Sheikh Radwan neighborhood, a Hamas stronghold, I spoke to a group of teen-agers.

"Do you want to be a martyr?" I asked one.

"God willing," Muhammad Talmas, an eighteen-year-old student, said.

"And, if not that, what?"

"An engineer, maybe."

"Can you be both?"

"Well, look at Ismail Abu Shanab," he said. The boy knew martyrology the way American kids know ballplayers. "He did both. He was killed in a missile attack last year. I want to go to Heaven. The Prophet Muhammad used to say, 'I want to go to Heaven after long work and deeds.' *Inshallah*."

"What do you think of Abu Mazen?"

"The words of Abu Mazen conflict with the Palestinian national interest. There are thousands of martyrs and prisoners in Israeli jails. The Palestinians should receive a reward on their behalf—all of Palestine."

"No coexistence? No two states?"

"No, no, no," he said. "Never."

The most prominent psychologist in Gaza, Eyad al-Sarraj, told me that if there was ever a settlement between Israel and the Palestinians the culture of martyrdom would dwindle dramatically. "When Sadat came to Israel and laid down his sword, the Israeli psychology changed overnight," Sarraj said. "We deserve the same thing." Until then, he said, the young men—and even the young women—of Gaza and the West Bank would seek martyrdom.

"Martyrs are at the level of prophets," Sarraj said. "They are untouchable. I can denounce suicide bombings, which I have many times, but not the martyrs themselves, because they are like saints. If you do that, you will discredit yourself completely. This is why when the stupid Bush said these are not martyrs, they are murderers—as if the only martyrs are Christian. We, too, have our martyrs. . . . He sacrifices himself for the nation. If you want to be a part of this culture, you have to understand this. I don't believe in religion myself, but I cannot say that Muhammad was nothing but a magician or that martyrs are wrong. This disqualifies you from the culture."

In the two weeks that followed the elections, violence certainly did not stop—there were rocket attacks, military reprisals, border incidents. But the incidents were fewer as time passed. Abbas went to Gaza to negotiate a *hudna* with the armed factions. The Israelis and the Palestinians talked about new security arrangements, even about military withdrawals from the West Bank. The newspapers were filled with speculation about an eventual meeting between Sharon and Abbas. Sharon spoke of a possible "historic breakthrough." No one spoke much anymore about Arafat, about his last years, about his mysterious end. There was no longer time for that. ♦

ANNALS OF L.A.

HOTEL CALIFORNIA

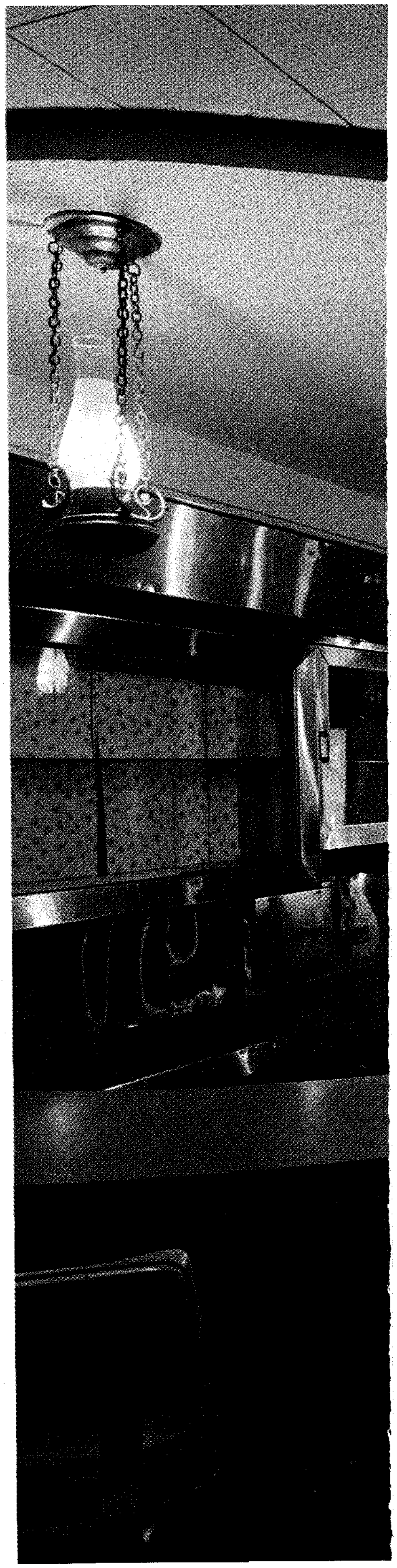
An architect's peculiar legacy, and a battle for a building.

BY DANA GOODYEAR

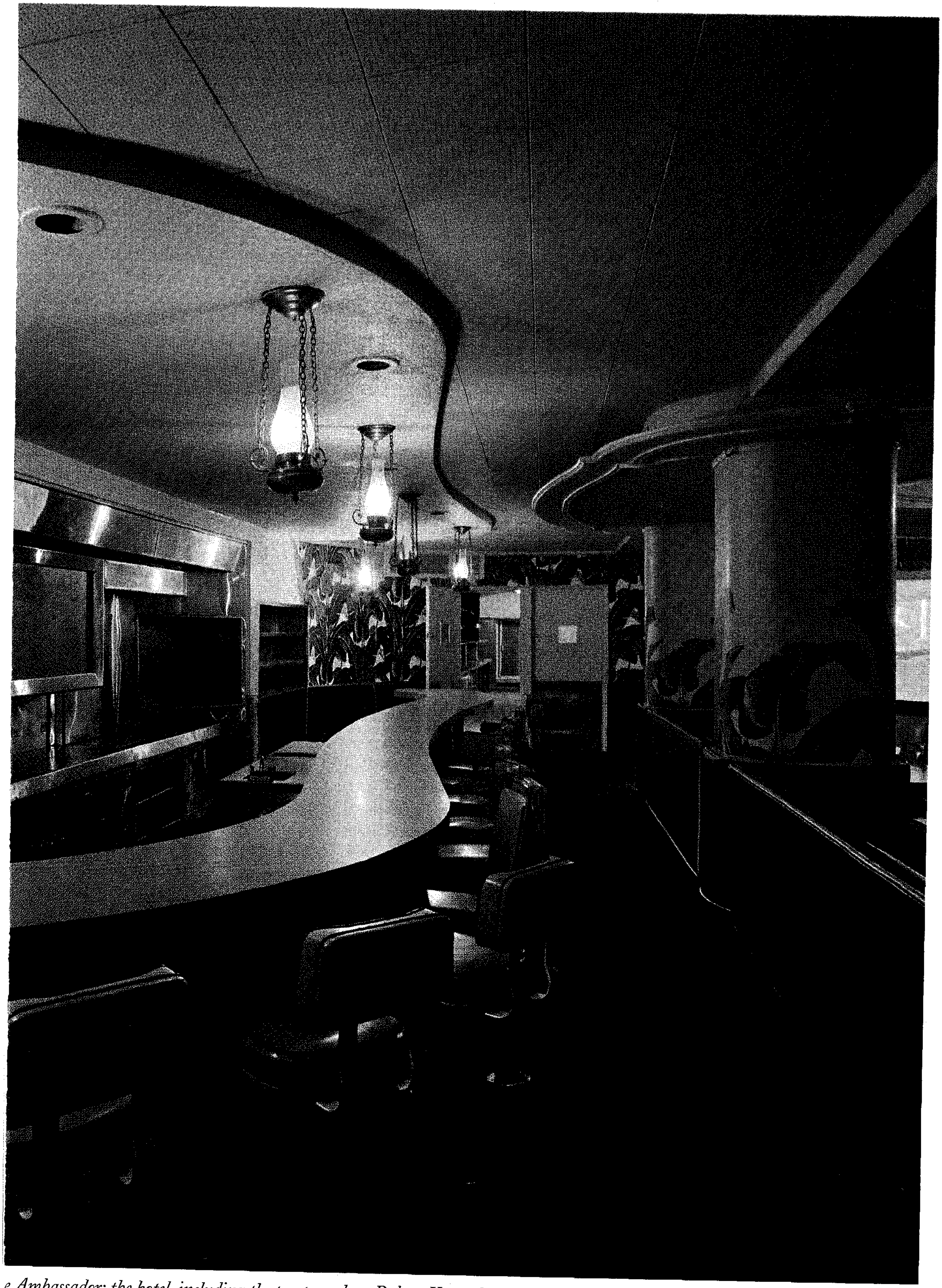
CARL VAN VECHTEN TRUST/PAUL R. WILLIAMS COLLECTION

The western entrance to the Ambassador Hotel, an H-shaped nineteen-twenties Spanish Revival that occupies a twenty-three-acre parcel on Wilshire Boulevard, is a monumental porte-cochère. Thick columns, banded with green, yellow, and shell-pink tiles, support a crown of flagless flagpoles and a simple rectangular Art Deco clock that is stopped at ten-thirty. Surrounded by dying palms and a few neglected birds-of-paradise, the hotel, at eighty-four, has the look of a governor's house in an abandoned tropical colony. In some places, the yellow plaster is so worn that you can see the outlines of the clay tiles beneath, like capillaries under fragile skin; in other places the plaster has flaked off altogether. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald used to stay here (they are said to have set fire to their bungalow, and their bill), but now the only residents are fifty feral cats, including Buster, Pinky, and Scabby (a mangy gray with half a tongue), who survive on scraps of catered food left over from movie crews. "The Graduate" was filmed at the hotel; more recently, the six hundred guest rooms, creepy basements, and derelict tunnels have been used as sets for horror movies and "Six Feet Under" episodes. This arrangement, which generates a million dollars a year in location fees, is likely to end soon. The Los Angeles Unified School District owns the building, and has announced that it plans to raze most of it and in its place erect a school for the thirty-eight hundred children, mainly Hispanic and Korean, who are bused out of the neighborhood every day.

Although the Ambassador was designed by Myron Hunt, its fate is intertwined with the peculiar and politicized legacy of an architect named Paul R. Williams, who died in 1980, at the age of eighty-five. Those who know Williams's

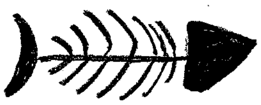


Paul R. Williams (left) designed the Coffee



e Ambassador; the hotel, including the pantry where Robert Kennedy was shot, may be torn down. Photograph by Robert Polidori.

work celebrate the houses he built for stars—Tyrone Power, Bill (Bojangles) Robinson, Frank Sinatra, Lucille Ball—and admire his curvaceous staircases and bars (in the Fountain Coffee Shop at the Beverly Hills Hotel; in the Palm Springs Tennis Club; in Perino’s restaurant, not far from the Ambassador, which is also slated for demolition). He is so closely identified with the L.A. Beaux Arts style that real-estate agents selling such houses often describe them as “style of Paul Williams.” By some counts, he built more than two thousand houses in his career; he once joked that he had built a house on every street in Beverly Hills.



In the late forties, the Ambassador hired Williams to design its Coffee Shop and a couple of bungalows, and to remodel the dining room and the ceiling of the Embassy Ballroom, where weddings and cotillions were held. But his significance, at least in the eyes of those who periodically lift him from obscurity, is due not only to his actual work—which is graceful, conservative, and lastingly attractive—but also to the fact that he was black. Williams would probably have been denied service at the Coffee Shop: the Ambassador wasn’t integrated until the mid-fifties. (As far as anyone can remember, Lena Horne was the first black person to stay at the hotel, when she spent the night there after a performance, rather than going to the Dunbar, on Central Avenue.) For some, in a city with a historical ambivalence about its black citizens, Williams has become a potent symbol of racial injustice. Although he was the first black member of the American Institute of Architects, and later its first black fellow, the story most often told about him is that he had to learn to draw upside down in order to avoid making his white clients uneasy by sitting too close to them. But when Williams wrote about this skill, in an autobiographical essay called “I Am a Negro,” published in *American Magazine* in 1937, he described it as an artistic sleight of hand. It was about making a dazzling first impression, so that people would think twice about judging him by the color of his skin.

By the time Williams began working on the Ambassador, he had a flourishing practice, and was regularly turning down jobs. The hotel was thriving, too. Margaret Burk, a former publicist and a devoted Ambassador booster, describes the opening-night party, on New Year’s Eve, 1921, as a kind of coming out for Southern California. There were three thousand guests, including Mrs. Doheny and Mrs. Van Nuys. “The splendor of the setting for the affair probably has never been equaled on the Pacific Coast,” a newspaper reporter wrote at the time. Soon the Ambassador was an emblem of L.A. cosmopolitan swank: Rudolph Valentino secured papier-mâché palms from the set of “The Sheik” as decoration for the Cocoanut Grove, the hotel’s night club, and three Oscar ceremonies were held there; Norma Jean took classes at the Emmeline Snively Blue Book Modelling Agency, which had offices on the mezzanine floor; Richard Nixon secluded himself in a suite in 1952 to write his “Checkers” speech. Wilshire Boulevard, established by the presence of the Ambassador as a major thoroughfare, filled with restaurants and department stores. Then things took a turn for the worse: on June 5, 1968, Robert Kennedy was ambushed and killed by Sirhan Sirhan in a pantry off the Embassy Ballroom, where he had just delivered his California Democratic Primary victory speech. Over the next twenty years, the city continued to expand westward, toward the beach, and Wilshire became a seedy business district, populated by the newly arrived and the left-behind. In 1989, the Ambassador was closed, sold to Donald Trump and a group of developers, and then “eminent domained” by the school district, a proceeding that took more than a decade.

Several years ago, the school district took possession of the hotel and began a painstaking deliberation over what kind of school to build. In the spring of 2003, when the district revealed its plans—five options that ran from total demolition to almost total preservation—everyone had something to say about it. A coalition of community groups, led by the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, wanted a brand-new school as quickly as possible, with nothing spent on preservation which could be going toward textbooks and classrooms. Ambassador nostalgists wanted to hang on to the site of their honeymoons and their senior proms. The Los Angeles Conservancy, which had saved the oldest remaining McDonald’s, in Downey, and St. Vibiana’s Cathedral downtown, advocated “adaptive reuse” of the building, and hoped to reform the city’s image as a “throwaway metropolis.” Karen E. Hudson, Williams’s granddaughter and the author of “Paul R. Williams, Architect: A Legacy of Style,” recognized the need for a school—and the fact that the hotel wasn’t a Williams original—and was inclined to stay out of it, until, as she put it, “Someone went to a meeting and said that I was in favor of tearing the place down. That’s when I got involved.” She sided with the conservancy, on whose board she used to sit. The Kennedy family wanted the assassination site destroyed, and invoked R.F.K.’s commitment to the disadvantaged as a reason not to spend money on conservation. And Lawrence Teeter, the lawyer representing Sirhan, who claims that his client was a hypnotized pawn in a C.I.A. plot, maintained that demolishing the assassination site would be tantamount to the destruction of evidence. (Kennedy’s last meal, Teeter points out, was at the house of John Frankenheimer, the director of “The Manchurian Candidate.”) In October, the school district arrived at what the board thought was an inspired compromise: it promised to save the Williams-designed Coffee Shop, the Embassy Ballroom ceiling (either Williams’s remodelled version or Hunt’s original), the Cocoanut Grove, and the porte-cochère. It also said it would consider saving the pantry, which it regards as the building’s most historically significant site.

The Ambassador is a sad, shadowy, falling-down place, and the pantry, an awkward nook between the dusty kitchen and the backstage of the Embassy Ballroom, is the psychic epicenter of the decay. It is also the only place on the grounds where photography is not allowed. The hulking ice-maker behind which Sirhan lay in wait remains, several feet from where Kennedy fell. On that spot, a panel of linoleum has been removed from the floor, exposing the bare composite floorboard underneath. (There is a rumor that a looter stole it, seeking a drop of Kennedy’s blood.) A treacherous passage—the floor is sinking in, and a recent visitor broke his leg—leads to the Embassy Ballroom, which is bubble-gum pink, with a Grecian-wave motif around the awnings and a frieze of charioteers at either end. Daylight streams in through a large hole in the roof. In another place, Williams's ceiling—elegant, arched, and covered with square pink panels—has caved in, and the panels are hitting a charioteer in the head. Thirteen rubber garbage bins are placed around the floor to collect leaks.

The Coffee Shop, which the school district plans to turn into a teachers' lounge, is on the ground floor, along a row of stores with mostly empty display cases and scattered bits of lettering ("Borsalino hats"; "Give Him an Oleg Cassini Tie"). Lanterns suspended from the ceiling form shallow haloes in the gloom. The carpet is tattered, and the stuffing is coming out of one of the banquettes. Two squat columns and the walls are covered with palm-frond wallpaper, which was hung by a production crew to make the restaurant look like the Polo Lounge in the Beverly Hills Hotel, also designed by Williams in the late forties. "That wallpaper's very distinctive, so a lot of people go, 'Oh, the wallpaper, yeah,' " Glenn Gritzner, a representative of the school district, says impatiently. (He regularly contends with what he calls "that's where Frank Sinatra tripped over me" reminiscences.) "It's, like, no. That's a problem we have all over the property. There's a crest above one of the check-in areas, and one of our board members was, like, 'That's so awesome, are we going to be able to keep that and incorporate it?' What I said to her was, 'Yeah, we can keep it, but it's a twenty-seven-cent piece of foam that a film company put up a few years ago and never took down.' "

Though shabby, the Coffee Shop feels like an oasis—dark-green and mellow cream colors, deep seats, voluptuous lines. The bar squiggles toward the back wall, a shape echoed in bas-relief on the ceiling directly above. Max Bond, a black architect who worked for Williams as a summer intern in 1956, sees this fluid style, which Williams also brought to the houses he designed, as more than just a formal expression. "It represents an escape from all the terrors of the day, if you will," Bond said. "It was a way of saying, 'This is how you should live your life.' " Jeh V. Johnson, another black architect who worked for Williams that summer, respectfully disagrees with his friend's assessment. "I think Williams would have thought of it a little bit differently," he said. "He would have thought, What is the most graceful, elegant statement I can make on this building? Not necessarily as a way of escaping harshness and hardship. I think he had put that behind him in his own life as thoroughly as he could."

In the July, 1913, issue of the N.A.A.C.P. magazine *The Crisis*, W. E. B. Du Bois wrote of a recent trip to Los Angeles, "The air was scented with orange blossoms and the beautiful homes lay low crouching on the earth as though they loved its scents and flowers. Nowhere in the United States is the Negro so well and beautifully housed, nor the average efficiency and intelligence in the colored population so high." Between 1900 and 1930, the black population grew from two thousand people to nearly forty thousand. Williams's parents, Chester and Lila, had come in the early eighteen-nineties from Memphis, where Chester was the headwaiter at the Peabody Hotel. Paul Williams was born in L.A.'s garment district, at 8th and Santee, in 1894; not long ago, a developer of apartment lofts nearby put up a fountain commemorating the birthplace. Chester, who became a fruit seller, died of tuberculosis at the age of thirty-three, when Williams was two. Lila died of the disease two years later, and Williams was brought up by a family that his parents knew from the First African Methodist Episcopal church. His foster father, Charles Clarkson, was a janitor.

Even as a child, Williams knew that he wanted to be an architect or an artist, and, after graduating from high school, in 1912, he took classes at the Beaux Arts Institute of Design. He excelled, and won the Beaux Arts medal. (He later studied architecture at the University of Southern California, and took courses in color harmony and interior design.) In 1914, he got a job with a successful Pasadena architect named Reginald D. Johnson, who built expensive traditional houses; one of his colleagues there was Gordon Kaufmann, who became the architect of Greystone Mansion and a lifelong friend. After Williams started his own office, in 1922, his work often appeared next to Kaufmann's in *Architectural Digest*.

In the course of the nineteen-twenties, the population of Los Angeles doubled, in what the historian Carey McWilliams called "one long drunken orgy, one protracted debauch." The L.A. Beaux Arts style—an eclectic jumble that allowed Regencys, Georgians, and Spanish Colonials to stand side by side in the same development—suited the new Hollywood rich, who imagined themselves in mansions but didn't trust their own taste. "Paul Williams did exactly what a lot of newcomers to California wanted," Jeh Johnson says. "When the movie colony began to grow, you had lots of people coming out from wherever in America and certainly earning lots of money. Being able to afford a house for themselves, they wanted to build one that looked like it had been there or had been done by somebody who had

"Go right in—he's expecting you."

Victoria Roberts

“I know mulling when I see it, Ramona.”

• •

some grounding in Southern California.” Williams understood his clients’ wish for grandeur but tempered it with a measure of restraint. He was known as polite and gentlemanly—and conflict-averse. Whenever anything went wrong, he sent out his white office manager to deal with the contractors. Wesley Howard Henderson, an African-American architectural historian and one of the few academics to have studied Williams, thinks that his style was particularly appealing to an arriviste clientele. “Self-made people . . . may have believed that Williams had a special ability to work with them because they perceived Williams as self-made,” he wrote in a 1992 U.C.L.A. dissertation on Williams.

By all accounts, Williams was an excellent showman. “Other people in his office came in wearing shirts and slacks, but he was dressed every day as if he were going to an elegant dinner party,” the widow of the architect Edward Fickett, a former employee, remembers. A 1936 photograph of Williams by Carl Van Vechten shows a light-skinned and soft-looking man, with a hint of a smile and gentle shadows underneath his eyes. He is wearing a suit, as he is in almost every available picture, and his tie and pocket handkerchief are expertly plumped. In “I Am a Negro,” he wrote that in the early days of his practice white clients occasionally turned up at his office and balked upon discovering his race. His strategy was to pretend that he was too busy even to consider taking on their project, and to pique their curiosity by saying that he couldn’t accept jobs for less than ten thousand dollars: “I knew that nothing so impresses the average American as the illusion of financial success, especially if that success is encountered in an unexpected quarter.”

Williams’s first high-profile house was for the automobile magnate E. L. Cord, a former mechanic and race-car driver who became a millionaire car manufacturer (his company made the Duesenberg). The house, which was finished in 1931, had a fifteen-car garage, and bathroom fixtures of fourteen-carat gold. Several years later, Williams built another spectacular house: a twelve-thousand-square-foot white Georgian Colonial on a three-acre plot off Sunset, for Charles Correll, the writer and actor who played Andy on the radio show “Amos ’n’ Andy.” Williams gave it a shapely portico, with narrow two-story streamlined columns, and embellished the staircase, a classic Williams swoosh, with fleurs-de-lis. Everything was spacious and well proportioned—even the servants’ quarters, which faced the gardens. Correll had been a bricklayer in his youth, and he laid out the large radial brick entry plaza in front of the house himself. The writer Sidney Sheldon, who has lived there for thirty years, added ten thousand square feet—scrupulously imitating Williams’s design—and recently put the house on the market for $19.5 million.

During these years, Williams lived with his wife, Della, and their two daughters in a humble, one-story house in South Central—largely because Los Angeles had privately enforced Jim Crow laws, in the form of restrictive covenants drafted by homeowners’ associations to keep non-white people out. In 1951, he built himself a house in a mostly white neighborhood now called Lafayette Square, off Crenshaw. The small neighborhood is full of traditional houses, several of them by Williams, and is distinguished by its wide, planted avenue and fat, healthy palms. Williams’s house—which his family still owns—is sleek and white, with a second-floor porch and a cool lanai, and is surrounded by giant ferns. When he started building the house, the neighbors panicked. “They were putting flyers on every house saying, ‘You better sell because your property values are going down,’ ” Karen Hudson told me. “This was a famous architect, by the nineteen-fifties! It wasn’t like Jack the Ripper was moving in or something.”

After the Second World War, architecture shifted away from the excesses of the L.A. Beaux Arts style and toward a spare, more economical, utilitarian ideal. Williams tried to keep pace. In 1945, responding to the postwar housing shortage, he published a book called “The Small Home of Tomorrow,” and followed it with “New Homes for Today” in 1946. The books advocated open plans, flatter roofs, and a minimum of ornament, and demonstrated a number of low-budget contemporary designs, including the Neutra Home. (Williams and Richard Neutra had collaborated on a government housing project a few years earlier.) The same year that “The Small Home” came out, the editor of *Arts & Architecture* magazine initiated the Case Study House Program, a project that promoted the new socially progressive aesthetic by sponsoring houses from aggressively modern architects—Neutra, Raphael Soriano, Eero Saarinen, and Pierre Koenig among them—and publishing the results.

Williams’s principal contribution to this movement was indirect and undocumented. The owners of Pierre Koenig’s Case Study House No. 22, a twenty-three-hundred-square-foot glass box cantilevered over the edge of a cliff in the Hollywood Hills, couldn’t find a bank that would give them a construction loan.

"The way it was perched, everybody thought it wasn't a good, safe financial move," Hudson told me. But Williams was on the board of Broadway Federal Savings & Loan—founded by Hudson's other grandfather, H. Claude Hudson, it was specifically intended to serve the black community—and he persuaded the bank to lend the money. Case Study House No. 22, which was completed in 1959, is the defining image of L.A. modernism, and is often referred to as the most photographed house in the world.

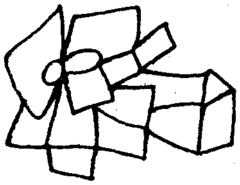
But the totem of modernism with which Williams is most often associated is one he had little to do with: the soaring, aerodynamic double parabola of the theme pavilion at Los Angeles International Airport. Despite many articles and books crediting him, Williams was not on the design team for the theme pavilion. (He was a member of the joint-venture office for the entire airport project.) The story, which has annoyed the architects who did work on the drawings—many of them were from William Pereira and Charles Luckman's firm—originated with a photograph taken by Julius Shulman in 1965, a few years after the dedication. It shows Williams, his hair white and the wrinkles in his forehead deep, standing before the building with a quizzical expression on his face.

Shulman is ninety-four and lives in a 1949 Soriano house in the hills, with tumbling planters of succulents out front. His studio is filled with books of his photography and the files that he keeps on every architect he's ever worked with. When I went to see him, a packet of Williams articles and photographs was lying on his desk. The famous picture, he said, had been taken on an assignment for the United States Information Agency. As Shulman has recounted elsewhere, when he drove Williams out to the airport and positioned him in front of the building Williams said, "Julius, don't forget, I was not the architect of this building. This was done by William Pereira and his staff." According to Shulman, the U.S.I.A. used the photograph internationally to promote the image of America as a racially inclusive democracy. Eventually, the story that Williams was responsible for designing the theme pavilion made it back home and took root. Shulman was amazed that people believed it. He said, "Don't forget that Paul Williams was not a modernist."

At the end of November, the conservancy, appalled by the school district's decision to raze the Ambassador, sued; so did seven other groups, including the Art Deco Society of Los Angeles. The Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, appalled by the conservancy suit, filed a brief to block it. Even Lawrence Teeter filed a suit, on behalf of Sirhan Sirhan, the Committee to Preserve Assassination Sites, and the Assassination Archives and Research Center. He wants to perform acoustical tests, similar to the ones that were done at Dealey Plaza, in Dallas, and is outraged that nobody will let him anywhere near the pantry.

Meanwhile, across town, in the upscale Westside neighborhood of Holmby Hills—between Beverly Hills and Bel Air—another Williams building was under siege by another school. The building, a lovely 1936 residence commissioned by a South African merchant named Morris Landau, has had many owners over the years—including Bruce McNall, the onetime owner of the L.A. Kings, and Ron Perelman, the financier—and is now owned by a private school called Harvard-Westlake, whose middle-school campus is next door. Harvard-Westlake would like to expand, and that means removing its original 1927 Spanish Colonial Revival administration building and the Morris Landau house.

In the late twenties, close to the time of the neighborhood's founding, the Holmby Hills Homeowners Association adopted a restrictive covenant. It stipulated that "neither the whole nor any part of said premises shall be sold, rented or leased to any person not of the white or Caucasian race nor shall the same be occupied by any such person, except as the servant or employee of the person using said premises exclusively for residential purpose." Now the Holmby Hills Homeowners Association is trying to keep Williams *in* the neighborhood, by keeping the Morris Landau house where it is. Fearing noise and speeding cars and the commercialization of their residential neighborhood, the neighbors oppose the school's plans. But it is the story of Paul Williams that moves them. "You can't tear down a Paul Williams house and put a driveway there!" Marcia Selz, the president of the Homeowners Association, says. She admits that she began learning about Williams only recently, but now she is a passionate defender of his legacy. "It shows no respect. It's a sin to replace it with a driveway and a boxy administration building. We believe it's not just the house: it's Paul Williams. His life was such a tribute to what humanity can be. It's important for us to remember this man." In the service of their cause, the Homeowners Association has enlisted the retired reverend of Williams's First A.M.E. Church (which he attended and built), the Los Angeles Urban League, Karen Hudson, and more than four hundred others.



John Amato, the assistant headmaster of Harvard-Westlake, sees things differently, of course. "We're trying to modernize the school to meet the needs of L.A. city kids, so that they can be leaders in this community," he says. He needs a new library and bigger classrooms, and he can't let sentimentality stand in the way. In an unlikely convergence, Harvard-Westlake—a school for which the tuition is some twenty thousand dollars a year—is essentially making the same argument as the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund. But Amato has what he thinks is a very good solution. He has found a family in La Cañada Flintridge, near Pasadena, who will buy the Morris Landau house for a dollar, and the school will help pay to transport it. Williams built a number of houses in Flintridge in the twenties and thirties; his first commissions were there. Amato is sensitive to the historical importance of the house, not least the fact that its architect would have been forbidden to live there. His solution takes that into account, too. If all goes well, he says brightly, "We can relocate the house to another neighborhood where he also might not have been able to live." ♦

FICTION

THE ROADS OF HOME

BY JOHN UPDIKE

In his rented beige Nissan, in a soft but steady November rain, David Kern exited from the Pennsylvania Turnpike at a new toll booth and was shot into an alien, majestic swirl of overpass and underpass. For some alarming seconds, he had no idea where he was; the little village of Morgan's Forge—an inn, a church, a feed store—which should have been on his left, had vanished behind a garish stretch of national franchises and retail outlets. The southern half of the county, a woodsy stretch of rural backwardness when, soon after the Second World War, his family, at his mother's instigation, had bought back the family farm, was now a haven for Philadelphians, who were snapping up the old stone farmhouses for weekend retreats. There were even, he had been told, daily commuters—more than an hour each way, but for them it was somehow worth it. For his part, fifty years ago, Kern couldn't get out of the region fast enough.

He felt lost. Then a rusted, bullet-pierced road sign in the shape of a keystone, naming Route 14, oriented him, and he pressed on the accelerator with a young man's verve. He knew this road: the gradually rising straightaway, with Morgan's dam down below on the right; the steep downhill plunge, heralded by a sign advising trucks to shift to a low gear, toward the creek that curled around the roofless shell of the one-room schoolhouse his mother had attended as a child; and then the sharp right turn, slowing you more than the car pressing behind you ever expected, onto the stony dirt lane, long since macadamized, that led to what had been, for a time, his home.

He drove between the twin housing developments that had once been the Gengrich dairy farm and old Amos Schrack's orchard, and from the crest saw what had been his family's land. The meadow, low land once drained by stone-lined ditches that had been dug by his grandfather and great-grandfather, was no longer mowed; instead it was planted in rows of evergreens and birches for sale to landscapers. Beside it, quite buried in sumac and wild raspberry canes, lay the grassy road his mother used to walk, all by herself until joined by the Gengrich children, on her way to the one-room schoolhouse. There had been a towering tulip poplar beside the meadow which had survived into Kern's middle age, as had his mother. She would tell him how, in warm weather, she would pause in her quiet walk beneath the tree's big heart-shaped leaves, grateful for the shade and for the birdsong, subdued by the heat, in the branches.

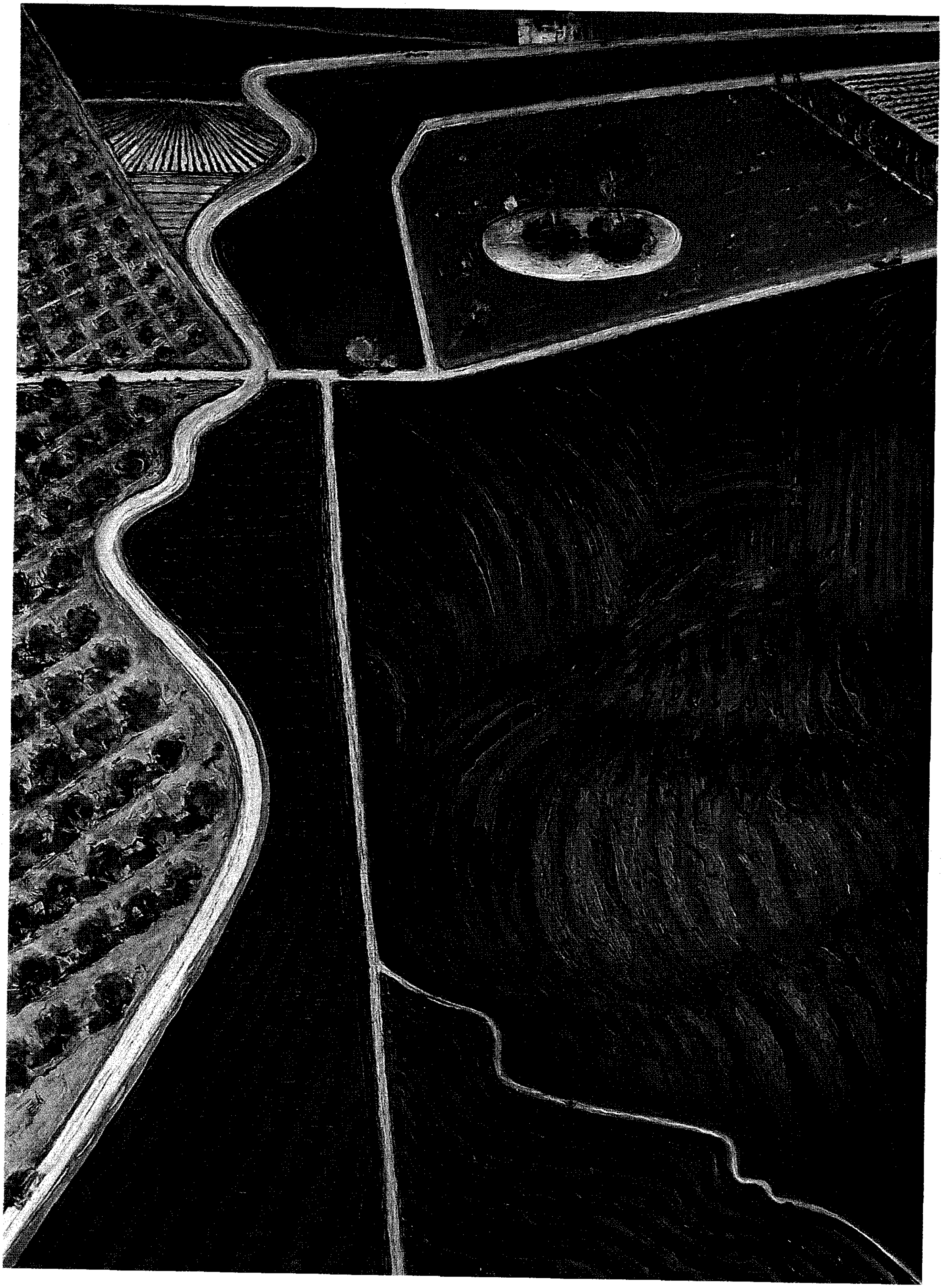
His vivid image of her as a little girl—her hair braided and pinned so tight by her mother that her scalp hurt, walking in her checked dress and matching ribbons down this lonely road between the fields—had been her creation, as she conjured up for him those days of paradisiacal country loneliness, of trusting animals and hazy silence. She had wanted to infect him, another only child, with her primal girlhood happiness, so that when he inherited the farm he would live on it. In the event, he had inherited it only to get rid of it quickly. The thirty acres on one side of the road, with the barn and house and chicken house, he sold to a cousin, and the remaining fifty, fields and woods, he rented to the neighboring farmers, the Reichardts, thus keeping the green space free of development, as his mother would have wanted. He had inherited as well her childhood bird guide, with carefully pencilled annotations and in the back a list of the species she had spotted on this farm—an index of her loneliness, this absorption in birds. One of her tales of herself recalled, with a trace of lingering grievance, how fiercely her mother had scolded her for climbing into a basket of freshly dry wash in imitation of a nesting bird.

Kern, the absentee owner of fifty acres, felt guilty at the rarity of his visits. His career had taken him West. He had retired from teaching English at Macalester College, in St. Paul, and he and his wife, who hated the cold, had moved to Southern California. He drove past his old house with hardly a glance. The cousin had sold it, and then it had been sold again, to a Philadelphian, and renovated beyond recognition. Where sandstone stepping stones had once led the way across a lawn mostly crabgrass, a smooth circular driveway now enclosed a clump of shrubs in shades of green like a nursery display, crowded around a terra-cotta gargoyle. Kern's mother's many birdhouses, and her wind chimes on the back porch, were gone.

He kept driving and pulled into the parking lot for the Reichardts' produce stand. Their farm, one of the few surviving in the region, had prospered as the south of the county filled in with new customers. The Reichardts were pious people but not superstitious about keeping up with the times. Kern's annual check was now printed by a computer; the simple shed that he remembered, with an awning and a few boards on sawhorses holding bushel baskets of peaches and apples, sweet corn, and string beans, had sprouted freezers and cash registers and supermarket carts and a sizable section of imported gourmet delicacies. Young Tad Reichardt, who usually dealt with Kern on his rare visits, was off with his family for a week at Disney World. "He goes every year, down to Orlando," a girl at the cash register explained, in the friendly local style. "He says it's never the same trip—as the children get older, they see different things. Now, you live near Disneyland, I understand."

"Miles from it. Miles and miles. I've never been."

"Oh. Well, Mr. Reichardt got your letter saying you were coming. He said I was to fetch his father when you did." Though her hair was worn in a Mennonite cap, she pulled a cell phone from her apron pocket and deftly punched in numbers with her thumb, a trick all young people seem to have.



PAINTING BY WAYNE THIEBAUD

Kern protested, "There's no need to bother. I can see for myself. Things are going fine here."

"He's here," she announced into the tiny phone. Within a minute a member of Kern's own generation, Enoch Reichardt, appeared, damp with rain and grinning widely. They had been boys together, on adjoining farms, but their attempts to play together had not been successful. Enoch, a year younger, had brought a softball and bat over to the Kerns' yard—the Reichardts had no yard, all the space between their buildings was used for equipment and animals—and David, newly a teen-ager and not yet used to his own strength, had hit the ball far over the barn, into the thorns and poison ivy past the dirt road, next to the tumbledown foundation of the old tobacco-drying shed. The road in those days, before it was macadamized and straightened, swung closer to the barn, to the broad dirt entrance ramp, and then dipped downhill to run along the meadow, under the tulip poplar. Though the boys searched for a scratchy, buggy twenty minutes, they never found the ball, and Enoch never came back to play.

But today, more than fifty years later, he seemed to bear no grudge, and Kern was happy to see someone nearly as old as he looking so well—stocky and tan, repelling the rain as if waxed. His grin showed straight white teeth. Enoch's teeth had been crooked and brown and must have pained him for years. He asked Kern if he would like to see his fields, how they were being farmed.

"It's pretty wet out," Kern said. "I think I get the idea."

He had arranged to meet two old classmates, with their spouses, at the Alton Country Club that evening, and was wearing a Burberry, a gray suit, and thin-soled black loafers bought at a Simi Valley mall.

Enoch's uncannily white smile broadened as he explained, "We'll go in my car. It'll take hardly a minute. There's some new ideas around since you were here last. My car's right outside. David, should I get you an umbrella?"

"Don't be silly," Kern said. "It's just a drizzle."

"Yes, well. That's the way I look at it," Enoch allowed. His car was a comforting relic—a black Ford sedan, with its chrome painted black. The former playmates slithered in. Not far along, on the edge of the enlarged parking lot, which even in this weather held a dozen customers' cars and vans, stood the first of the new ideas—a kind of quonset hut of white plastic, upheld by arching ribs. "Remember how we used to grow strawberries?" Enoch asked.

"How could I forget?" Strawberries had been David's 4-H project, a means of making a few hundred dollars a summer toward his eventual college expenses. He and his mother had stood along the road selling them, to his intense embarrassment.

Enoch braked. "Would you like to take a look inside?"

David felt he had no choice, though the rain seemed to be intensifying and his Burberry was rain-resistant rather than rainproof. Enoch roughly, in his proud excitement, widened a gap in the white plastic, and David peeked in. He saw strawberry plants up on several narrow troughs, four feet off the ground, so that the berries, ripe in November, hung down into sheer air like cherries, like Christmas ornaments. "Aquaponic," Enoch told him. "The plastic keeps the warmth in and allows for the solar effect; all the nutrients are trickled in from a hose. There's no dirt."

"No dirt," David numbly repeated.

"Remember how the berries would rest on the ground and pick up sand? And the turtles and snails would nibble at them before they could be picked?"

"And how your back would ache from straddling the row and bending over. The daddy longlegs would climb up your arms."

"No more," Enoch said, pleased that David remembered. "You pick these standing up."

"Amazing," Kern conceded, climbing back into the car, after checking the edges of his shoe soles for mud. Enoch wore thick yellow boots and a green slicker over denim bib overalls; he was one with the weather.

He asked, "Would you like me to drive you over the big field?"

"Sure," David said. "If you won't get stuck."

"I don't think we'll get stuck."

In farming the acres, and in selling to people who drove here and picked the fruits and sweet corn themselves, the Reichardts had laid out little roads, firmed up with spalls to check erosion, between the crops. *Development*, David thought. They drove, slightly skidding, among reserve lengths of PCP irrigation pipe, and dormant rows of strawberries grown through perforated black plastic, and several prefabricated shacks slapped up for the convenience of the summer trade. When the big field was under his mother's management and lay fallow in clover and wildflowers, David used to mow it through a long August day on their old John Deere tractor, which he could drive before he could drive a car. Bought secondhand and painted mule-gray, the machine had crawled over the terrain gently rocking, dragging behind it the roaring rotary blade in its rusty housing.

"Would you like to get out?" Enoch asked.

The car had gone as far as it could. David looked down at his shoes, and solicitously thought of the crease in his suit pants. He had never been a guest at the Alton Country Club before.

"Sure," he said. He still owed Enoch that softball. They got out and stood together in the rain. A breeze made itself felt, at this high point of the hill. From here on a clear day you could see the tips of the tallest buildings in Alton, ten miles away. Today the city hid from sight.

As Kern feared, the red earth was as gummy as clay. Transferring his feet from one patch of old-fashioned hay mulch to the next, he watched his steps so carefully that he missed much of Enoch's friendly lecture on crop rotation, and on new varieties of corn that didn't take so much nitrogen out of the soil. *Soil*, Kern thought, looking down. Ancestral soil, and to him it was just mud. He turned his attention upward, to the corner patch of woods that no farmer of these acres, for some reason, had ever bothered to cut, de-stump, and plow.

Feeling his listener's attention wander, Enoch said, with what seemed a twinkle but might have been raindrops in his eyelashes, "Your mother used to talk about how someday you might build a house up here."

David said, "Well, I may yet." He couldn't resist adding, with a wave over the irrigated and plasticized acres, "And make all this my front yard."

On the way back, sure enough, the Ford began to slew and wallow in a stretch of puddles a short distance from the paved road. But Enoch downshifted and the black Ford slithered free, and Kern was spared having to get out, in his delicate clothes, and push.

He took away a gift, a paper bag of Enoch's fresh apples. Heading north toward Alton, he moved from his mother's territory into his father's; he and his father, a schoolteacher, had daily driven together in this same direction, away from the farm to the region of schools, of close-packed row houses, of urban pleasures.

Kern was staying the night at the Alton Motor Inn, in West Alton, but was in no hurry to get there—to make his way through a newly developed section of malls and highways sprung up in recent years. He turned off Route 14, past the Jewish cemetery and under the railroad bridge, into Alton, over a bridge that his father, out of work at the start of the Depression, had helped to build, hauling blue-tinged Belgian blocks and tamping them between the trolley tracks. The old man remembered that summer as pure misery, and his son never crossed the bridge without imagining drops of his father's sweat as part of it, dried into the concrete. Kern's bloodlines had left not just country traces.

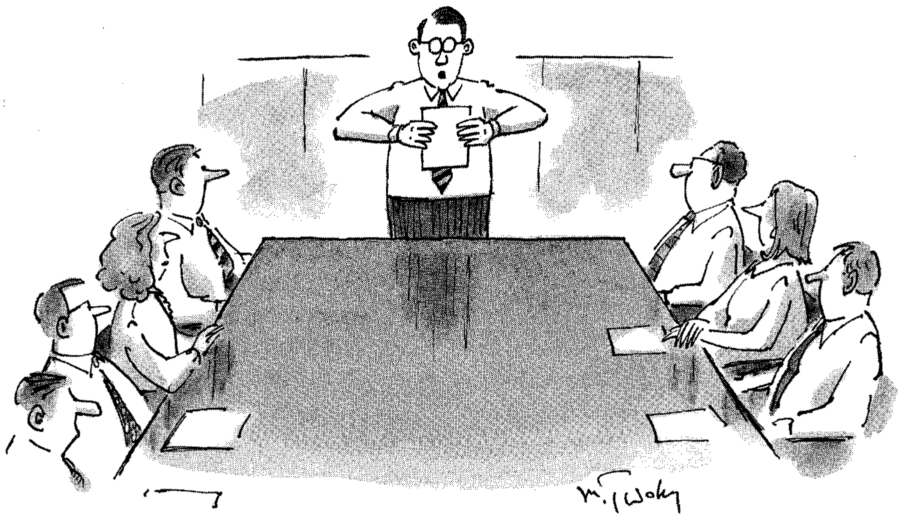
Alton was a dying city, but its occupants persisted in living. The ebb of its prime, which David located in his own boyhood but which his elders put earlier yet, before the Depression, had stranded a population that occupied the tightly built grid like sleepy end-of-summer wasps clustering in an old paper nest. Even in his boyhood the venerable industrial town had been prolific of what the child had thought of as throwaway men—working-class males whose craft or occupation had withered and left them with nothing to do all day but smoke cigarettes and wait for a visit to the local bar to come due. Driving through south Alton, Kern spotted them through the flapping windshield wipers, standing on tiny porches, watching the rain drip from the aluminum awnings and darken the composition sidings up and down the street.

He drove on, into the wide center blocks of Weiser Street where the trolley cars would clang and pass, where the shoppers and moviegoers would throng, and where David, when his parents still lived a trolley-car ride away, would methodically wander through all the five-and-tens, from McCrory's up to Kresge's, looking to enlarge his collection of Big Little Books. At a dime apiece, it was possible, even on a thirty-five-cent-a-week allowance, to accumulate a sizable hoard. The five-and-tens all wore warm clouds of perfume and candy scent just inside the entrance doors, and some had pet shops, with canaries and parakeets and goldfish, at the back. Alton, it seemed to him then, had everything you could ever want in life.

He had been told by Ned Miller, one of the few high-school classmates with whom he kept in touch, that Blankenbiller's Department Store was being torn down, to make way for a new bank. *A dying city*, Kern thought, *and they keep putting up banks*. In the old days you couldn't find a parking space on Weiser Street; now he slid into one without trouble on the Blankenbiller's side of the square. Not just the grand old department store, with its wrought-iron cage elevators and overhead pneumatic tubes for the whizzing brass cannisters carrying change and receipts from a hidden treasury above, was being torn down: a row of buildings beside it, where Kern remembered shoes and office supplies and hardware being sold, had vanished, baring walls whose sloppy mortar had never been meant to show, and basement chambers, now filled with rubble, that hadn't seen daylight for a century. Even in the rain, with daylight draining from the autumn afternoon, men were pecking away with their dolefully creaking front-loaders.

His mother had once explained to him how she had gotten fat: she blamed Blankenbiller's basement restaurant, where the apple or rhubarb or pecan pie à la mode had been irresistibly good, to top off a lunch when she was working in the Christmas season as an extra saleswoman. You got so tired, she explained, standing on your feet being gracious for ten hours; the ordeal had made her a food addict. Kern gazed down into the sodden, brick-strewn grave of his mother's girlish figure, a figure he had glimpsed only as a toddler. It had been at Blankenbiller's that, one day when shopping, he had let go of his mother's hand and got lost, burbling to the floorwalker and wetting his pants.

One of the city's surplus men, curious as to what Kern was seeing, crept out from one of the few sheltering doorways left on Weiser Street. Kern winced in fear of being asked for a handout; but the man mutely stared with him through the chain-link fence. Kern's father used to embarrass him, in the city, by talking to strangers; the more disreputable they appeared, the more enthusiastically his father seemed to regard them as potential sources of enlightenment. Kern had been a fastidious, touchy adolescent, but had slowly shed many of his inhibitions. Now he turned to



"My report is on money."

the poorly clad, indifferently shaven stranger and attempted conversation: "Some hole, huh?"

The man turned away, offended by such levity. He might have said "Yeah," or said nothing at all, Kern wasn't sure.

The Alton Motor Inn and Function Suites sat slightly north of the river, where Kern's mental map of the county gave out. North of Alton had always had a different, hostile flavor: the high-school kids were tougher, the industrial landmarks were bigger and darker, and the rich, who had made their millions off the dismal mills and quarries, lived on fenced estates well back from the highways. The geography was a tangle to Kern; confusing new highways sliced through former villages and sped shoppers to malls that were themselves becoming shopworn. Just after his mother's death, without her to guide him, he had got lost on his way to the Alton airport to meet his children for the funeral. Though he now managed, after several wrong turns, to find the motor inn on its little rounded hill of asphalt, Kern was afraid he could not find, in the dark, in the rain, the Alton Country Club.

The girl at the front desk, dressed in a mannish jacket, had tufty hair dyed in blotches of magenta. To her it was so obvious where the country club was that a few stabs of her pencil at a miniature map and a hurried recitation of several route numbers satisfied her that Kern was as good as there. Uncomprehending, but afraid of appearing senile, he docilely nodded and went to the room. His room, its picture window overlooking the muffled traffic of a mysterious cloverleaf, seemed a safe cave. But his classmates, in deference to their age and frailty, had urged an early dinner hour, so, instead of lying down on one of the inviting twin beds and turning on television, he unpacked his toilet kit, brushed his teeth, changed his tie to a more festive one, and tried to clean his muddy loafers with a wad of moistened toilet paper. Out in the parking lot, the controls of the rented Nissan still seemed foreign, the dashboard miniaturized and dim. There was an invasive sweet smell in the car: he had forgotten Enoch's apples. Blazing streams of other cars were hurrying home; the county was not so depleted as to lack a rush hour. He was due at six, in just fifteen minutes.

As Kern squinted to see road signs, the headlights behind him pressed mercilessly; those coming at him wore troubling halos of refraction. He had turned off at the route number the neo-punk girl at the hotel desk had written for him, but possibly in the wrong direction. Anonymous mills and storage tanks hulked on one side, with silhouetted conveyor belts and skeletal stairways; on the other, after a distance, a restaurant in an old limestone house advertised itself with a discreet white sign, and, closed for the winter, a driving range and miniature-golf course hurtled by. None of this was exactly unfamiliar—ages ago he and some boisterous friends had played among those windmills and tunnels, or somewhere similar—yet nothing told him exactly where he was. He was being punished: he had lived his formative years in the county while disdaining to learn its geography, beyond the sections proximate to his ego and his selfish needs. Now in revenge, the area manifested itself as a shapeless shadowy mire, experienced at a perilous speed.

IN THE PROVINCES

Normandy

The body of a dead dog lies
Slumped on a railway embankment, chewed up
Among the chalk-numbered sleepers.

The longer you look, the more
His skin merges with the dirt, the pools
Of gravel in among the emerald grass.

And then the stain also of this life
Is finally laundered away.

—*Durs Grünbein*

(*Translated, from the German, by Michael Hofmann.*)

Then a sweeping searchlight straight ahead declared, he decided, the presence of the Alton airport. It was down to about two flights a day yet kept its lights on. But it seemed to be, if he remembered the hotel clerk's sketchy indications, on the wrong side of the highway. Kern was beginning to sweat. He would never get there. The highway surround was thinning into countryside: distant isolated house windows, darkened low stores for carpeting and auto parts. He wanted to scream. He needed to urinate. At last, the broad glow of a combination Getty gas and 7-Eleven appeared. Yet the doughy woman behind the counter—the lone sentinel in a sea of darkness, wearing steel-rimmed granny glasses—seemed frightened of him, her only customer. He saw as if through her oval lenses his pink panicked face and wrinkled Burberry and California-style necktie, splashily patterned in poinciana blossoms. When he explained his disorientation, her face hardened; she appeared offended that he could have gone so far astray. "Go back the way you came," she told him. "It's after the airport. You passed it."

"How far after?"

"Oh—a mile or so."

"On the right or the left?" These people, it occurred to him, did not want out-of-staters to make themselves too much at home.

"On the left."

"Is there a sign or anything?"

The woman mulled this over, continuing to size him up and keeping one hand out of sight below the counter, probably on the alarm button. "You'll see it," she grudgingly promised. "There's two big gateposts."

And Kern did, ten minutes later, see the gateposts, very faintly, on the other side of the road. They might have been ghosts—spectral apparitions between beats of the windshield wipers—but his only hope of refuge lay between them. It was the worst kind of highway, a two-lane wanting to be a three-lane. The streams of traffic behind him and coming toward him looked endless; he braked in the center of the road and, as halted headlights piled up in his rear-view mirror, he swerved into the oncoming lane. The lead car gave him a long blast of protest on its horn but braked enough to avoid the head-on collision that Kern's heart had leaped up to greet.

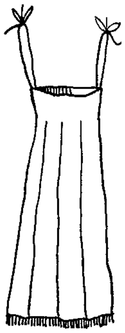
He was in. A tiny sign in a flowerless flower bed named the club. An allée of horse chestnut trees led him between two areas of darkness—golf-course fairways, he guessed. The clubhouse loomed, spottily lit. There was plenty of parking; it was a weekday night. He got out of the car. His eyes watered; his knees were trembling. Ned Miller was waiting for him in the foyer. "We were getting worried," Ned said.

"I had trouble finding it," Kern told him, fervently gripping his old friend's hand. "Then when I finally found it I nearly got killed pulling in. The guy who had to brake gave me a huge blast."

"That's a bad left turn. You should have been coming from the other direction."

"I know, I know. Don't rub it in. I'll do better next time. Maybe." Ned said nothing; both men were estimating that there might not be a next time.

Ned had been, like Kern, a good student, but less erratically and noisily so. He spoke no more than he needed to, and talkative Kern, so excitable he sometimes stuttered as the words crowded in, had realized that Ned was his best friend only when he realized that silence was the other boy's natural, companionable mode. Ned's head was full of unvoiced thoughts; they were for him a reservoir of strength. He had become a lawyer, a professional keeper of secrets.



The three other guests were seated at the table, their faces glamorously lit by glass-shaded candles. Ned's wife was Marjorie, a firm-textured, silver-haired graduate of a different high school, north of Alton. Kern's other classmate he had known as Sandra Auerbach, though she had long since married one of Ned's legal partners, Jeff Lang. It must have been Ned's sly, considerate idea to include the Langs, since Kern had, at a safe distance, loved Sandra all through school. It had taken no great imagination to love her—she was conspicuously vivacious, an athlete and a singer as well as the class beauty. He had heard, though, that she had fallen prey to various ills. He wondered if the aluminum walker tucked over by the windows was hers. Even as he gratefully took the place they had saved for him, beside Sandra, he observed that her face had been stiffened and distorted by some sort of stroke. Yet, since his love for her had been born in kindergarten, before sex kicked in, it was purely spiritual and impervious to bodily change.

In his happiness to be next to her, he gushed, "Sandra, I had the most terrible time getting here, not knowing where anything is anymore. Not that I ever did. Furthermore my night vision isn't that great. All the headlights had this rainbowy hair on them. In my panic I pulled right into the path of an oncoming car, and even in that split second I was thinking, Well, Stupid, you were born here, you might as well die here. Was the traffic always this bad?"

She stared at him out of her stony, twisted face, and with a spasmodic motion lifted her hand toward his lips as if to touch them, to still them. "David," she said carefully, "I don't hear well. Speak more slowly, and let me watch your mouth." Her hair, a silky chestnut-brown permitted some streaks of gray, was sleekly swept back; he saw that the socket of her dainty ear was daintily filled by a flesh-colored hearing aid. But her voice had kept its old quiet confidence; she had never had to shout to get attention. Except for her bust, spectacularly bloomed by the eighth grade, Sandra's physical attributes were precise rather than emphatic; she was like a photograph slightly reduced to achieve an extra sharpness. Her nose had a barely noticeable bump at the bridge and her mouth a slight, demure, enchanting overbite. Kern's lips tingled where Sandra had almost touched them.

He slowly mouthed, for her eyes, the

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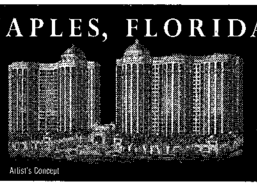

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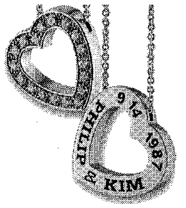

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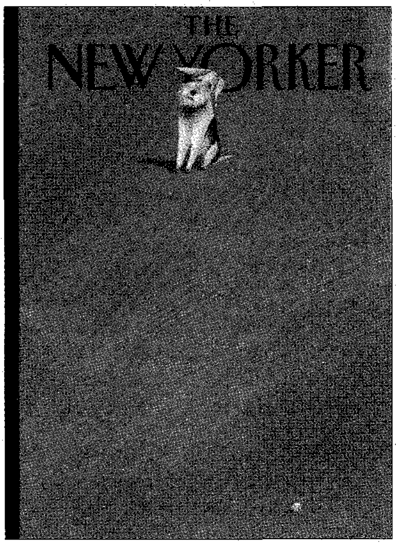

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words "It's won-der-ful to see you. I'm sor-ry I was late."

The general conversation sought its rhythm, and David, the returned prodigal, for a time was assigned the lead voice. But the questions he asked, the details he remembered, related to a few decades that for him had the freshness and urgency of youthful memories but that for his friends were buried beneath a silt of decades, of thousands of days spent in this same territory, maturing, marrying, childbearing, burying parents, laboring, retiring. He called across the table to Ned, "Remember how our mothers used to take us out once a summer to the Goose Lake Amusement Park, at the end of the trolley line? They would sit there," he explained to the others, "side by side on a bench, while Ned and I went into the arcade and put pennies in these little paper peepshows that you cranked yourself—girls doing the hoochy-coochy in petticoats, all very tame, in retrospect. What the kids nowadays see, my God."

Decades of teaching had left him perhaps too fluent. He evoked aloud the long-gone trolley cars—their slippery straw seats, the brass handles at the corners to switch the backs back and forth at the end of the line, the serious-faced conductor with the mechanical changemaker on his belt.

"Every child had to have one," Ned chimed in. "As a toy."

"Exactly!" Kern agreed. He recalled aloud Ned's old house—its abundance of toys, its basement playroom, its side yard big enough for fungo, and the slate-floored screened side porch where they used to play Monopoly for hours. Kern, a poor schoolteacher's son, had envied that house, and intended to praise it. But he got the name of Ned's pet Labrador slightly wrong, Blackie instead of Becky; Ned made the correction with an uncharacteristic, irritated quickness.

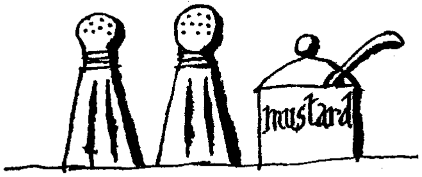
Monopoly made Kern think of the canasta craze in their junior and senior years, those rows and rows of cards laid out on their parents' dining-room tables, and asked if anybody could still remember the rules. Nobody volunteered. Marjorie Miller began to look glazed, and stated firmly that no one in her high school played canasta; it never spread, she insisted, to this part of the county.

Deferential waiters, meanwhile, took orders and brought food. They kept calling Ned "Mr. Miller" and Sandra "Mrs. Lang"; only Kern went unnamed, the club outsider. He had his own clubs, far from here, but had he stayed he could never have made the Alton Country Club; there was no road for him up into it.

As, feeling the fatigue of his day's adventures, he fell relatively silent, his companions lapsed into local talk—the newest mayoral scandal in Alton, the hopeless condition of the downtown, the misfortunes (illnesses, business misjudgments, ill-advised second marriages) of mutual friends. Kern thought that Sandra kept up with the conversation pretty well, her calm gray-blue eyes darting from mouth to mouth, her own lips opening in a frequent laugh. When she laughed, the gleeful pealing, a bit shriller than expected, sounded a chord in Kern's head first heard during recess at elementary school, on the little asphalt lake around the old red brick building, strictly divided into boys' and girls' sections. Her voice, though not loud, could be heard over those of all the other girls at play. He must have been listening for it.

The waiters—two of them, for this was a light night—stood ready, in their pleated shirts and striped bow ties, to take orders for dessert and coffee. The group looked toward Kern, and he said what he sensed they wanted to hear: "I don't need anything. It's late for us old-timers." There was a babble of grateful agreement, and a pronged fuss of gathering coats and umbrellas. Sandra used her walker, but as if it were a plaything, swinging it jauntily ahead of her. Outside, the rain had stopped, and Kern could see off to the left a shadowy green, with its numbered flag still in the hole, ready for play if November relented.

On the glistening driveway, they shook hands and hugged goodbye. He and Sandra studied each other's face a second, trying to decide between a kiss on the cheek or on the mouth; he de-



cided on a cheek—as it happened on the side somewhat paralyzed. Backing off, he said, "Take care. You're the best." Not sure the lamplight was strong enough for her to read his words, he absurdly gave her a thumbs-up, and blushed.

Marjorie, hugging him almost too firmly, said, "We're all in one car; you follow us. We don't want you getting lost again."

"Oh, I don't think I will. I just do the same thing backwards, more or less. Don't go out of your way. Ways."

"David. You follow us."

The four had come in a big midnight-blue S.U.V. belonging to the Langs. Marjorie's silver hair flashed in the back seat; Sandra's tidy profile sank into shadow beside her. Women rode contentedly in the back seat here. Jeff Lang's tail-lights led Kern down the long, hushed double row of horse chestnuts; at the highway, after a wait for all traffic to clear, the tail-lights turned left, away from the airport, then right at the restaurant in the limestone house. Almost immediately, they were moving down narrow city streets. They had been on the edge of Alton, all along. *What was I doing way out at the airport?* Kern asked himself.

This section of the city was strange to him. Lone pedestrians flitted warily across the rain-stained streets. The glowing windows of laundromats, delicatessens, and corner taverns slid by like the illumined spectres and tableaux in the water ride at the Goose Lake Amusement Park. Some of the signs were in Spanish. The S.U.V., seeming almost to brush the parked cars on either side, led him first downhill, and then up. Continuing uphill, the street smoothly became a strange bridge, high above the black river. It descended on the other side into blocks where gaunt semi-detached houses were approached up long flights of concrete steps. The two-car caravan came to a traffic circle near a large parking lot, with a garish state-run liquor store on one side, and Kern at last knew where he was: in West Alton.

He and his mother used to come to West Alton from the trolley stop in front of Blankenbiller's for his piano lessons with—yes, of course—Miss Schiffner. Thin, wan, wistful Miss Schiffner, perhaps once beautiful in her way, had he not been too young to notice. Concrete steps covered by green outdoor carpeting led up to her front parlor, where the upright piano waited amid doilies and porcelain figurines and dusty plush. Its white-and-black teeth were cold to touch, with his nervous hands. The keyboard had a right-angled lid that came down after the lesson, protecting the keys against dust. The trolley car at its stop—there had been no traffic circle then—would unfold a step with a harsh clack and David, leaping down, jarred the sour dread in his belly at not having mastered his lesson. This was before their move to the country, the beginning of his exile. His mother was still a city dweller, still banking on civilization, handing over precious Depression dollars in gullible hopes of lifting her son up from the ruck. It was clear to him and must have been to Miss Schiffner that he was no little Mozart, standing on tiptoe to tap out his first minuet.

Jeff Lang's smug ruby tail-lights continued halfway around the traffic circle, passed the liquor store, and headed up Fourth Street, toward the old textile mills that had been reborn as discount outlets and then had gone empty again, as the busloads of Baltimore bargain hunters went instead to the outlets near Morgan's Forge. It came to Kern that behind him, one block over from Fourth Street, there used to be an all-night diner where he, in no hurry to get back to the farm, would go alone after dropping off his date at her house. After a school dance, he would go with a gang of others, all the girls wearing strapless taffeta dresses if it had been a prom, their naked shoulders shining in the booths. Each booth had its own little jukebox, with "Stardust" and "Begin the Beguine" and Russ Morgan's "So Tired" among the selections. If Kern went there now, he could get a piece of Dutch apple pie with a scoop of butter-pecan ice cream, to make up for the dessert he had missed.

He wanted to reverse his course, but the Langs' tail-lights inexorably receded, waiting at every intersection for him to catch up. He couldn't believe it: they were going to lead him like some moron right to the parking lot of the Alton Motor Inn. In his head he shouted furiously, *I know where I am now! I'm here.* ♦

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THE CRITICS

A CRITIC AT LARGE

GROSS POINTS

Is the blockbuster the end of cinema?

BY LOUIS MENAND

The people who make the popcorn basically know what they're doing. The people who make the movies basically don't, at least not until the product is out there, and then it's too late. Moviemaking is a business almost in spite of itself. No film company was willing to invest in "The Birth of a Nation." Everyone said that David O. Selznick would lose his shirt on "Gone with the Wind." When he didn't, various parties determined to repeat the formula, and made "Mutiny on the Bounty," "Cleopatra," "The Greatest Story Ever Told," "Waterloo," and "The Bible." They lost their shirts. Universal and United Artists turned down "Star Wars"; Twentieth Century Fox, the studio that distributed it, gave George Lucas the rights to the sequels for nothing. After Steven Spielberg finished shooting "Jaws," he believed that his career was over. Almost the entire industry was certain that "Titanic" would be a financial black hole; it took in $1.85 billion at the box office, more than six hundred million dollars ahead of the next-highest-grossing picture of all time. The history of Hollywood is a comic routine of bad guesses, unintended outcomes, and pure luck. Half of the failures were well-intentioned, and half of the successes were, by ordinary standards of fairness and decency, undeserved. People do get rich making movies; more often than not, they're the wrong people. That's why moviemaking is so much fun to read about. Unless, of course, it's your money.

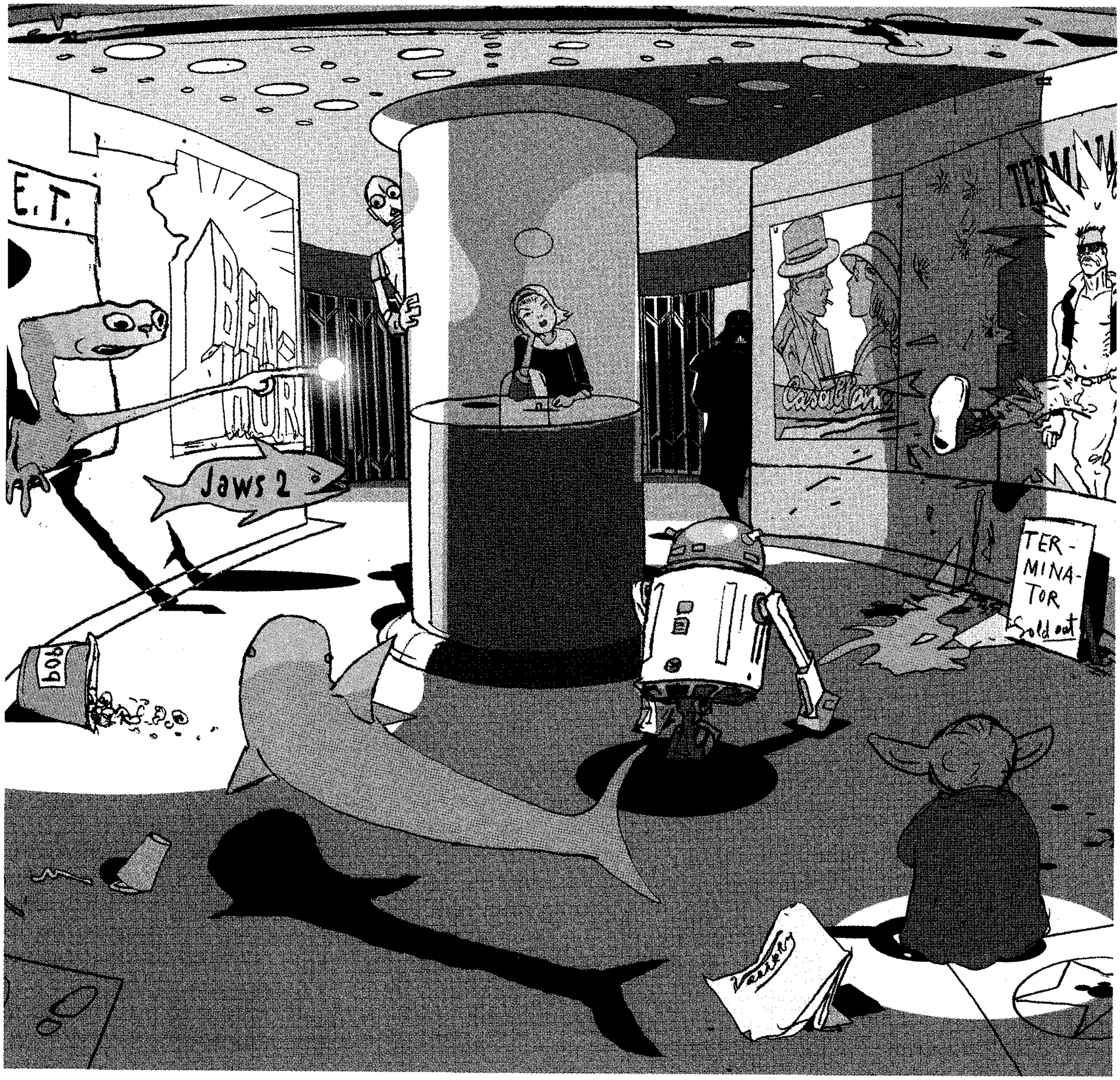
The cinema, like the novel, is always dying. The movies were killed by sequels; they were killed by conglomerates; they were killed by special effects. "Heaven's Gate" was the end; "Star Wars" was the end; "Jaws" did it. It was the ratings system, profit participation, television, the blacklist, the collapse of the studio system, the Production Code. The movies should never have gone to color; they should never have gone to sound. The movies have been declared dead so many times that it is almost surprising that they were born, and, as every history of the cinema makes a point of noting, the first announcement of their demise practically coincided with the announcement of their birth. "The cinema is an invention without any commercial future," said Louis Lumière, the man who opened the world's first movie theatre, in Paris, in 1895. He thought that motion pictures were a novelty item, and, in 1900, after successfully exhibiting his company's films around the world, he got out of the business. It seemed the prudent move.

Of course, "death," in this context, does not mean "extinction." What it means depends on the speaker. If the speaker is the president of the Motion Picture Association of America, the condition of the movies is a function of the variable that drives all consumer culture (including the publication of novels), which is the return on investment. If the speaker is the film critic of the *Times*, on the other hand, it's a function of the return on critical attention. What is good news on one method of accounting is not necessarily good news on the other. Since 1992, the entertainment industry has been America's second-largest export business, after aerospace; the television audience for the Academy Awards ceremony is said to be a billion people. It is still perfectly possible that, from any creative point of view, rigor mortis has set in.

David Thomson's "The Whole Equation: A History of Hollywood" (Knopf; $27.95) is a coroner's report. The title is misleading. The book gives roughly two hundred and ninety pages to the first fifty years of Hollywood and about eighty pages to the last fifty, and the true scope of its interest is even narrower. Thomson thinks that Hollywood had only two phases of first-class product: from 1927 to 1948, "The Jazz Singer" to the Paramount decision (the Supreme Court case that broke the studio system by forcing the studios to divest themselves of the theatre chains they owned); and from 1967 to 1975, "Bonnie and Clyde" to "Jaws." He considers silent film to be, essentially, pre-cinematic, because, in his opinion, the full movie experience requires sound; and he considers the contemporary blockbuster to be beneath critical regard. "I have nothing to say," he says, "about 'Star Wars.' "

In any normal history of Hollywood, "Star Wars" is kind of important, and if you are someone who believes that "history" means a maximum of information presented with a minimum of opinion, then "The Whole Equation" is not the book for you. But if you think that our interest in movies has everything to do with our feelings about them, and if you have a tolerance for repetition, digression, first-person indulgence, and general narrative shagginess, then you are not likely to find a more affecting and intellectually absorbing book on film as a popular art. Thomson's subject is not, strictly speaking, the history of the movies; its subject is the history of *caring about* the movies. That calls for something more than just the facts.

Tom Shone's "Blockbuster: How Hollywood Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Summer" (Free Press; $26) is also a history of caring, though few readers would call it affecting. Shone's book is an anti-valedictory for Thomson's Hollywood, written by someone for whom the movies began not in 1927 or in 1967 but in 1977, the year of "Star Wars." Shone mentions Thomson, but his prime specimen of the reactionary taste he disdains

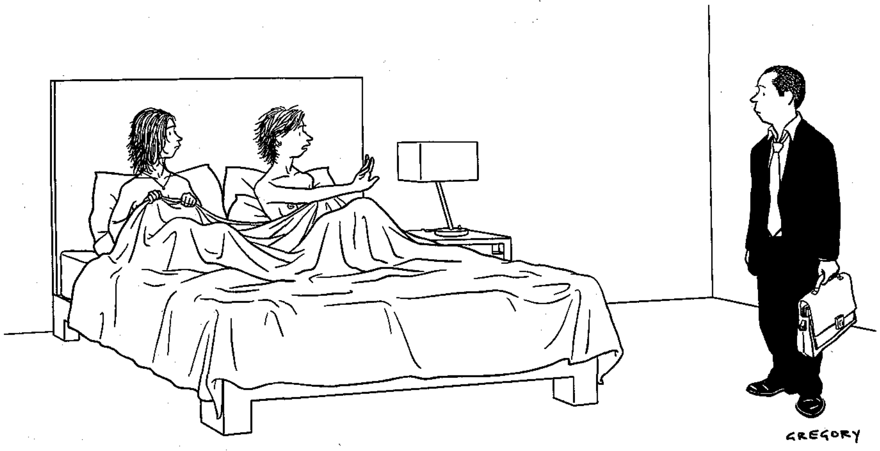


The typical blockbuster today makes between twenty-five and forty per cent of its total box-office revenue the weekend it opens.

is Peter Biskind's history of Hollywood in the nineteen-seventies, "Easy Riders, Raging Bulls." Like Thomson, Biskind thinks that around 1967 American filmmaking caught fire and grew up, and then Spielberg and Lucas came along and put out the flames with great deluges of cash generated by junk food for fourteen-year-olds. Shone (who was born in 1967) thinks that if you can't enjoy what Lucas and Spielberg created—"Jaws," "Star Wars" and its first two sequels, the Indiana Jones movies, "Close Encounters of the Third Kind," "E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial," and the pictures their example made possible, movies like "Alien" and "Back to the Future"—then you just don't enjoy movies. What is death to Thomson was life to him.

Still, even Shone has his limit—specifically, "Independence Day," which came out in 1996 and marks, in his view, the start of Hollywood's decline into obscenely expensive bombast. "Independence Day" takes us to "Godzilla," a movie that even its makers did not like but which became the third-highest-grossing film of 1998; "Pearl Harbor," a dud universally acknowledged that made more than four hundred and fifty million dollars; and the second and third "Matrix" movies, roundly panned, whose box-office total exceeds a billion. Giants like these continue to stalk through the multiplexes, shaking gold from the heavens with their thunderous, THX Certified footsteps; but inside their high-definition, digitized craniums their tiny brains are dead.

The authors of "Open Wide: How Hollywood Box Office Became a National Obsession" (Miramax; $23.95) do not, especially, care. Dade Hayes and Jonathan Bing are editors at *Variety*. They arranged to observe the marketing machinations for three big-budget movies that opened on July 4, 2003: the third "Terminator," starring Arnold Schwarzenegger, who worked tirelessly to promote the film, and who, shortly after it came out, announced his candidacy for governor of



"It's not what you hope!"

• •

California; the second "Legally Blonde"; and "Sinbad," an animated picture from DreamWorks SKG. "Terminator 3" and "Legally Blonde 2" were "disappointments," which does not mean that they did not gross millions more than they cost. (Virtually no movie makes, officially, a net profit, but that's a separate, adventures-in-accounting story.) "Sinbad" was a bomb. Hayes and Bing believe that DreamWorks lost a hundred million dollars on it.

In 1950, M-G-M allowed Lillian Ross to observe the making of "The Red Badge of Courage"; in 1967, Twentieth Century Fox allowed John Gregory Dunne to cover the production of "Doctor Dolittle." Big mistakes. We have all got a little smarter since then, but the people who work in movie publicity have got a lot smarter. They are certainly not about to give reporters the kind of access that enabled Ross to write "Picture" and Dunne to write "The Studio," withering accounts of Hollywood vanity and folly. Although Hayes and Bing talked to many people about movie distribution, which is the main business the studios are in today, and although they have a lot of interesting information about the industry in their book, they did not produce a true inside look. They did not talk, for instance, to Jeffrey Katzenberg, who was the man behind "Sinbad." Still, the process and the product that they describe—admittedly, from the crassest possible perspective, which is the perspective of publicity and marketing—do seem soulless.

The contemporary Hollywood movie is what Harold Rosenberg once called an "anxious object." Rosenberg was referring to art after Pop, to a time when, suddenly, a painting of a soup can, or a pile of stones, or a wall of Polaroids was worth a lot of money. But were these works of art, or were they commodities? The distinction had become blurry. A similar thing seems to have happened around the same time to the movies. The legacy of the so-called New Hollywood, the period, in the late nineteen-sixties and early nineteen-seventies, from "Bonnie and Clyde" and "The Graduate" through the first two "Godfather"s, was the belief that critical worthiness and high returns on investment are symmetrical goods. They rise and fall together. With "Jaws" and "Star Wars," good-natured but cheesy adventure stories whose grosses put even the "Godfather" movies in the shade, that faith began to founder. Not that people haven't tried, God knows, but there is just nothing serious to say about the larger implications of "Star Wars."

This turn wouldn't have mattered so much at the time if the movies had never gone through their New Hollywood phase, and it wouldn't matter so much now if the industry didn't care. But the industry does care. The people who make movies need to be able to take themselves more seriously than the people who make popcorn do. The situation would be simpler if everyone was certain that the movies making money today have no more creative integrity or cultural significance than a beer commercial. But no one is certain. People fear that they've lost the key to the distinction. Hence the anxiety; and hence these three books, because that, basically, is what all of them are about.

Most autopsies of the cinema tend to be "It all started to go wrong when . . ." narratives. They're appealing in the same way those "wise old person who knows the secret" stories that turn up in so many fantasy-adventure movies today are appealing, and they have the same shortcoming, which is that in life there never is just one secret, and there never is just one cause. In the case of a collaborative, semi-regulated, high-cap, worldwide, mass-market entertainment like a Hollywood movie, identifying causes is like predicting next year's weather. A butterfly flutters its wings in Culver City, and a decade later you get "The Terminator."

One of the merits of "The Whole Equation" is that it avoids isolating a cause of death. It maintains a kind of analytic deep focus; it tries to take in everything. Thomson thinks that some of the explanation for what happened to the movies has to do with the movies and the people who make them, but some of it has to do with the audience. "It's not so much that movies are dead," he suggests at one point, "as that history has already passed them by."

Many readers besides Tom Shone will find all this snows-of-yesteryear stuff exasperating. Thomson is particular about the movies he loves most: they are the movies of the nineteen-forties, "an exquisite mixture of a lifelike dream world explored through the most refined and elaborate camera styles—with vast sets, insinuating tracking shots, and lighting that throbs with inner life—with the fabrication of music in the air, day-dreamy situations and indulged fantasy." There was nothing very admirable about the industry that produced these films; it was an oligopoly designed for the enrichment of the oligarchs. But the greed and the philistinism didn't matter, because something about the medium, and the talents it attracted, put the movies, Thomson says, "on the cusp of feeling for an entire society."

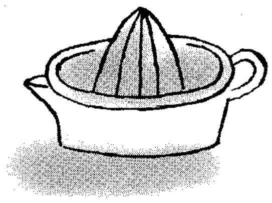
This may seem a little like saying that music was never the same after swing—a matter of taste, and when you were born. One of Thomson's favorite movies (he wrote a book about it for the British Film Institute) is Howard Hawks's "The Big Sleep," with Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall, which came out in 1946. In

"The Whole Equation," he calls it "sublime." What's mainly noticeable now about "The Big Sleep" is the cynical incoherence of the plot—during the filming, Hawks called Raymond Chandler, from whose novel the movie was adapted, to ask him to explain who killed one of the characters; Chandler didn't know—and a lot of double entendres that seem on the verge of camp. But you don't have to love "The Big Sleep" to take Thomson's point, which is only that people no longer respond to movies the way they once responded to "The Big Sleep." This is not simply an argument from nostalgia; it has an empirical corollary. In 1946, weekly movie attendance was a hundred million. That was out of a population of a hundred and forty-one million, who had nineteen thousand movie screens available to them. Today, there are thirty-six thousand screens in the United States and two hundred and ninety-five million people, and weekly attendance is twenty-five million.

And what is the main cinematic experience? The tickets, including the surcharge for ordering online, cost about the same as the monthly cable bill. A medium popcorn is five dollars; the smallest bottled water is three. The show begins with twenty minutes of commercials, spots promoting the theatre chain, and previews for movies coming out next Memorial Day, sometimes a year from next Memorial Day. The feature includes any combination of the following: wizards; slinky women of few words; men of few words who can expertly drive anything, spectacularly wreck anything, and leap safely from the top of anything; characters from comic books, sixth-grade world-history textbooks, or "Bulfinch's Mythology"; explosions; phenomena unknown to science; a computer whiz with attitude; a brand-name soft drink, running shoe, or candy bar; an incarnation of pure evil; more explosions; and the voice of Robin Williams. The movie feels about twenty minutes too long; the reviews are mixed; nobody really loves it; and it grosses several hundred million dollars.

The standard explanation for this is economics. About ten or fifteen years ago, it became dogma in the movie industry that you could make a movie for ten million dollars or for a hundred million dollars, but there was no profit in anything with a budget in between. One reason for the Hollywood budget gap is above-the-line expenses—that is, the cost of the talent, as opposed to the cost of the crew, sets, travel, promotion, and so on. There are famous exceptions—"Independence Day" is one—but the safe thinking is that only a handful of stars can open a movie worldwide. These stars command a healthy portion of the budget, and they usually take their money in the form of an advance against a percentage of the gross. If the movie doesn't "make back," the star gets to keep the advance; if the movie is profitable (and the star has a deal based on "first-dollar gross," rather than on a figure reached after other profit participants have been paid off, which is often never), then the star's income can continue to grow, and at the expense of everyone else waiting in line for a slice. The risk of opening without a name is too great to take. The actors who provided the voices for the animated characters in "Shrek 2"—Mike Myers, Eddie Murphy, and Cameron Diaz—were paid ten million dollars each for a few days' work in the studio. No prosthetic attachments; no early calls. Stars are brands. So, of course, are names from the pop-culture universe—Hulk, Spider-Man, King Kong—and sequels, such as the "Die Hard"s, the fourth of which is scheduled to shoot this summer. These are all ways of preselling the picture, before the reviews can unsell it.

The key to the system is marketing. In 1975, the average cost of marketing for a movie distributed by a major studio was two million dollars. In 2003, it was thirty-nine million dollars. The aim of promotion is "unaided awareness"—in other words, "buzz," a diffused sense in the public that the movie is on the way. Those previews are one means of buzz development; another is the "coverage" of forthcoming movies on television news programs, on entertainment-news shows, and in newspapers, media outlets that often are owned by the same conglomerate that owns the studio.



The all-consuming desire is to get as many ticket buyers as possible into the theatre on the first weekend, and, amazingly, people oblige. The crowds at the opening of a blockbuster are a fascinating window on mass psychology. If people just wait a couple of weeks, they can have their pick of seats. But when they get back to school or to the office no one will want to hear what they thought of the picture. That was last week's conversation. This is why the primary target for the blockbuster is people with an underdeveloped capacity for deferred gratification; that is, kids. Kids need to see things *right away*. Deals are therefore made with the theatre chains which give the studio a large percentage, sometimes ninety per cent, of ticket sales in the first week, with a rapidly declining percentage in subsequent weeks. The theatre gets to deduct the "house nut," the cost of keeping the theatre running; more important, it gets to keep a hundred per cent of the income from sales of popcorn, soda, candy, video games, and anything else it can cram into the lobby. Concessions account for thirty-five per cent of the revenue in the major theatre circuits. This explains the three-dollar water.

When the studios could enforce the practice of "block booking," which required theatres to agree to exhibit less desirable titles in order to get the big features, movies opened in a small number of theatres in major urban areas and then spread across the country. Gradually, as the studios started negotiating with competing chains, this method of platform release was abandoned. The big features now open on three thousand-plus screens, in order to maximize the benefit of their promotion. Before the word of mouth has made it around the block, the movie has already taken in, from the opening weekend, typically somewhere between twenty-five and forty per cent of its total gross. "Hulk" set a record with a seventy-per-cent decline in ticket sales between its opening and the second weekend, but the average drop-off for all movies is fifty per cent, and it is almost the definition of a blockbuster that the first weekend is a make-or-break proposition. Marketing costs for the "Matrix" sequels exceeded a hundred million dollars. The reason that those movies had such enormous grosses, despite terrible reviews and negative word of mouth, is that each opened on eighteen thousand screens simultaneously worldwide. As Shone says, about the typical blockbuster, "By the time we've all seen that it sucked, it's a hit."

Hollywood studios distribute two hundred movies a year (down from between five and seven hundred a year in the studio era), and only a handful are blockbusters. But the blockbuster is where the money is. Every once in a while, there is talk about the return of the midsize film—the picture that costs twenty million or so to make, and that attracts interest and attention on its own merits. "Sideways" is this season's poster child. "Sideways" is reported to have cost around sixteen million dollars to make (exclusive of marketing costs). After ten weeks, it had grossed twenty-two million dollars. You might be able to get Tom Cruise to walk across the street for twenty-two million dollars, but that's about it. "Elektra," a widely panned fantasy adventure which opened in the middle of January, the deadest month in the business, grossed twenty-two million dollars in two weeks. "Sideways" was unbranded by stars or title (and was not, in marketing parlance, "toyetic," susceptible to merchandising deals). In those first ten weeks, it was shown on three-hundred and seventy screens. "Elektra" was based on a comic-book character, and it opened on thirty-two hundred screens. To put both pictures in true blockbuster perspective: "Troy," which is considered a failure, has grossed just under half a billion dollars. The poor reviews for "Troy" didn't matter, because seventy-three per cent of its box-office revenue came from overseas.

Foreign box-office income started exceeding domestic box-office income for Hollywood movies in 1993. For the typical top-ten box-office hit, sixty per cent of exhibition revenue comes from overseas. This is a reason that the women don't have much dialogue, and the men are too occupied with driving, wrecking, and leaping to utter more than an occasional mal mot. In the first "Terminator," Schwarzenegger had seventeen lines. Foreign audiences aren't paying to hear an interesting conversation. That's not what domestic audiences are paying for, either. The ideal product to market is a "four-quadrant" picture, a movie that appeals to men and women in both the over- and the under-twenty-five age groups. That's one reason performers with high adult recognition—Robin Williams, Eddie Murphy, Billy Crystal, Robert De Niro—are paid so much for cartoon voice-overs.

All the emphasis on box-office distorts the real financial profile of a movie, because theatrical distribution is just the first of many revenue streams. These include sales to pay television, sales to broadcast television, DVDs, and merchandising licenses. Blockbusters today aspire to be "tent-pole franchises"—centerpieces for multiple spin-off products, from lunchboxes to soundtracks, comic books, children's books, arcade games, and computer games. "Batman" earned three times as much from merchandise as it did from ticket sales; the makers of "Jurassic Park" sold a hundred licenses for a thousand dinosaur products. Blockbusters today *are* commercials: they're commercials for themselves. They also *include* commercials, in the form of product placement. The all-time record for product placement appears to be owned by the Bond film "Tomorrow Never Dies," which sold screen time to Visa, Avis, BMW, Smirnoff vodka, Heineken, Omega watches, Ericsson cell phones, and L'Oréal. This explains the brand names.

So what else is new? This is Thomson's question in "The Whole Equation": it can't be that commercialism is what's wrong with the movies, because Hollywood has always tried to sell its product in any way that it could, and to the largest possible audience. As Thomson says, "The urge to tell these stories is inseparable from the urge to make money." Techniques are more sophisticated, but very little about contemporary blockbuster economics is new. Hayes and Bing point out that the term "blockbuster" dates from 1951, when *Variety* appropriated it from real-estate jargon and ordnance talk to describe "Quo Vadis?," a movie with an unprecedented budget (seven million dollars), which was promoted with department-store window displays. As Hayes and Bing also explain, the methods used to market "Jaws," in 1975, were basically the same as the ones Warner Bros. used to market "The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms," in 1953—a summer movie that begins with an atomic blast in Antarctica and follows the logic that such an event implies (that is, the release from the ice of a dinosaur the size of a football field).

Hollywood has always had the foreign market on its mind. The United States has the highest per-capita movie attendance in the world, and one of the ways that Hollywood has competed with foreign film industries is by putting more money into its productions. The money goes right up on the screen, in the costumes, the sets, the special effects—a degree of spectacle that foreign moviemakers, with a smaller domestic market in which to recover their costs, cannot compete with. The extravagance of a Busby Berkeley musical, or of "Gone with the Wind," was the studio-era equivalent of blowing up the White House, in "Independence Day," or wrecking all those cars. It was something that everyone wanted to see but that only Hollywood could afford.

The profit participation that drives the growth of above-the-line costs dates from 1950, the year Lew Wasserman, then the head of the talent agency M.C.A., negotiated a deal for Jimmy Stewart to play in two movies, "Harvey" and "Winchester 73." The studio, Universal, didn't have the cash to pay the four hundred thousand dollars Stewart was asking, so Wasserman arranged for him to get half the movies' profits. (M.C.A. eventually bought Universal, and Wasserman found himself forced to accept the type of deal, disadvantageous to the studios, that he had created.) Thomson believes that profit participation has done the movies a lot of damage, because it allows people to profit from the success of an investment with no risk to themselves on the downside. He also thinks, more provocatively, that "creative control" is another source of trouble. When United Artists gave Michael Cimino the right of final cut on "Heaven's Gate," in 1980, it meant, Thomson says, that Cimino "owned a thing he had not paid for." He could indulge himself with other people's money. "Heaven's Gate" is, canonically, "the movie that killed the New Hollywood." It almost killed United Artists, too.

But where did United Artists come from? As Thomson reminds us, the company was formed, in 1919, by Charlie Chaplin, Douglas Fairbanks, Mary Pickford, and D. W. Griffith—four above-the-line people—in order to enjoy the profits of the films they were providing the talent for. Their inspiration was the first blockbuster ever, "The Birth of a Nation," which cost around a hundred and ten thousand dollars to produce (a budget that no film company was willing to take on) and eventually grossed sixty million. The movie had state-of-the-science promotional and marketing support, including the famous blurb attributed to the President of the United States, Woodrow Wilson: "This is history written in lightning." Wilson's interest in the film was the work of the author of the novels and stage play from which it was adapted, Thomas Dixon, who had been a classmate of Wilson's at Johns Hopkins. Dixon knew the movie business. When his offer to sell the story to the filmmakers for twenty-five thousand dollars was refused (since twenty-five thousand dollars was a quarter of the movie's total budget), he accepted points instead. It made him a millionaire. Griffith made money, too, but, he felt, not enough, and that was why he was happy to join in the creation of United Artists. Lucas and Spielberg are the descendants of Griffith and, even more directly, of Chaplin, who made millions from the movies he starred in: they are artist-businessmen. The type is as old as Hollywood.

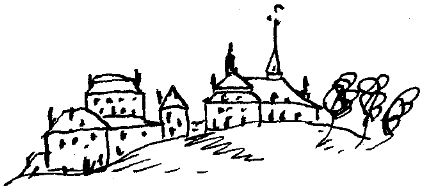
The drop in movie attendance after 1946 was sickeningly steep. Average weekly attendance in the United States in 1947 was ninety million, down by about ten per cent. In 1950, it was sixty million; in 1957, it was forty million. It bottomed out in the early nineteen-seventies, at fifteen million, but it has not climbed much since. (This is not only an American phenomenon. David Puttnam points out, in "Movies and Money," an excellent history of the business, that British movie attendance in 1946 was 1.6 billion, the highest in the world. In 1984, it was fifty-four million.) Almost no one had a television set in 1947, and the studio system was still intact. There was no reason internal to the entertainment business for the movies to lose their audience. They just did.

The blockbuster is a Hollywood tradition, but blockbuster dependence is a disease. It sucks the talent and the resources out of every other part of the industry. A contemporary blockbuster could almost be defined as a movie in which production value is in inverse proportion to content. "Troy" is a comic strip, but what a lavish, loving, costly comic strip it is. The talent, knowledge, and ingenuity required to make just one of the battle scenes in that film, or one mindless James Bond chase sequence, interchangeable in memory with almost any other Bond chase sequence, would drain the resources of many universities. But why doesn't anyone put more than two seconds' thought into the story? The attention to detail in movies today is fantastic. There is nothing cheap or tacky about Hollywood's product, but there is something empty. Or maybe the emptiness is in us. ◆

BRIEFLY NOTED

Prep, *by Curtis Sittenfeld (Random House; $21.95).* Any feelings of nostalgia for adolescence should be dispelled by the exacting intimacies of this first novel. Lee Fiora, a scholarship student at the prestigious Ault School (not Ault Academy, as her parents embarrassingly refer to it), negotiates her days there in a blaze of self-consciousness that is, by turns, hilarious and excruciating: "I believed then that if you had a good encounter with a person, it was best not to see them again for as long as possible." And yet she becomes an expert on the rituals that govern the rarefied microenvironment in which she finds herself: the students' fondness for catchphrases like "therein lies the paradox" and "LMC" (lower middle class); the taboo against enthusiasm for anything other than sports; the fact that the school always sings "God be with you till we meet again" at chapel before breaks. In the end, Lee's incisive vision of herself and others is her downfall but also—as this richly textured narrative suggests—her greatest gift.

Voices of Italian America, *by Martino Marazzi; translated from the Italian by Ann Goldstein (Fairleigh Dickinson; $55).* Homebound Italian literati spent the early twentieth century writing exquisite formalism (Pirandello) and sprawling sociopolitical novels (Silone). Meanwhile, their counterparts on these shores followed a different literary trajectory, one dictated largely by venue. Newspapers were the medium of choice in the immigrant community, and the Italian-language literary trends were commensurately pulpy, naturalistic, and plot-driven. Marazzi's anthology bristles with serial gangster fiction, breathless flapper romances, and impassioned tales of triumph over poverty, all of which make for a sharp contrast with his erudite elucidation of their historical context. The result is a glimpse of a largely forgotten literary heritage and of the life of what one epigraph calls "the Italian immigrant in the land of America who, enduring danger and derision, built a nation that never became a homeland."



Pol Pot, *by Philip Short (Henry Holt; $30).* Pol Pot once remarked that the Cambodian authorities in the nineteen-fifties "knew *who* I was; but they did not know *what* I was." Short, in his attempt to explain how a young man known for his bland amiability came to preside over the deaths of a million and a half people, follows the dictator from a childhood spent partly among palace concubines through his student days in Paris (where he read Stalin because Marx was over his head) to his imposition of a "slave state." Short does a good job on the political context of Pol Pot's rise, on his Buddhist influences, and on his gift for subterfuge. He remained almost invisible until the moment he took power. Later, busy killing his aides, he hid a Vietnamese invasion from his Army—then lived on for two decades, drinking whiskey and reading *Paris-Match* at his jungle base, before dying peacefully in his own bed.

Maharanis, *by Lucy Moore (Viking; $25.95).* A maharani is the wife of a maharaja, and through the lives of four such Indian queens, in two linked families over three generations, Moore demonstrates the changing currents of Indian politics and customs. The story starts with Chimnabai, the first queen to break purdah, in 1913, and ends with her granddaughter Gayatri Devi. Devi was the third wife of the maharaja of Jaipur, but after Independence stripped the princes of most of their power she ran successfully for Parliament. She was also a socialite—Jackie Kennedy was a friend—and the book is generally as concerned with parties and polo matches as with politics. The changes of the twentieth century seem to have been easier on the women than on their husbands and sons. With only a few exceptions (including Devi's husband, who had a heart attack during a polo match), the men died young, from complications of severe alcoholism.

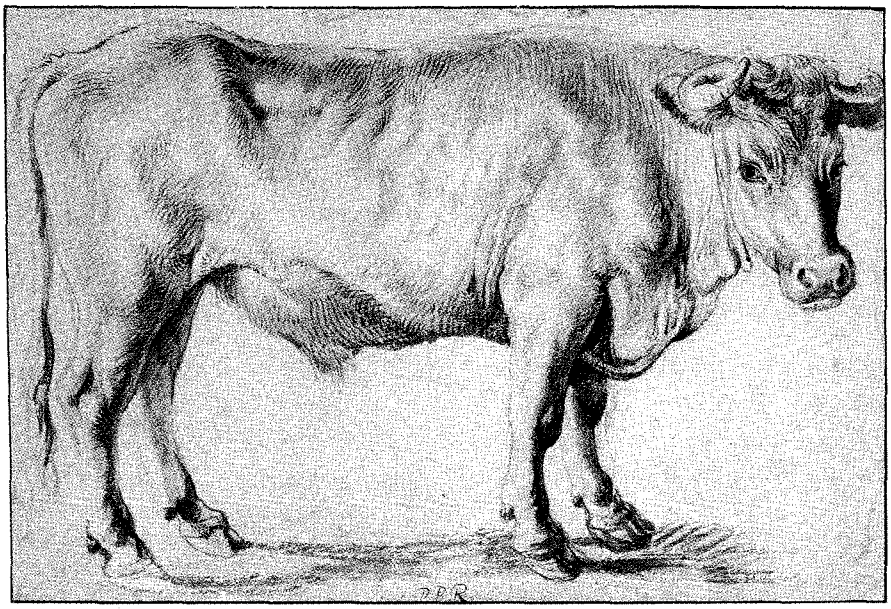
THE ART WORLD

RUBENESSENCE

The making of a successful style.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

My favorite picture in "Peter Paul Rubens: The Drawings," at the Metropolitan Museum, portrays an ox. In black and red chalks, with enhancing traces of other mediums, the work conveys ponderous mass, rippling musculature, bristling hair, and creased and dimpled, somehow palpably warm, skin. Turning its great head to gaze at us with mild, blameless stupidity, this is an ox's ox—likely the pride of one of the farms that Rubens owned outside Antwerp—by history's chief painter's painter. It was executed around 1618, in the early middle of the Flemish master's long, uniformly triumphal career as the leading pictorial decorator, propagandist, and entertainer for a Catholic Europe in the advanced phases of the Counter-Reformation. (As an adroit diplomat for the Spanish Netherlands, fluent in five languages, Rubens worked to reconcile kingdoms riven by religious wars; he also found time to be, among other things, a courtier, a scholar, an architect, a pageant master, a family man, an art collector, and a numismatist.)


"An Ox" (circa 1618), from a show of Rubens's drawings at the Met.

What I particularly appreciate about "An Ox" is that it isn't the image of a naked human being. Like many people, I have trouble with Rubens's nudes, especially the female ones: all that smothering flesh, vibrantly alive but with the erotic appeal of a mud slide. (Rubens, owing to moral constraints of the time, rarely worked from nude female models, and many of his women are what they look like: male models imaginatively plumped and upholstered, fore and aft.) Nor do Rubens's characters appear significantly more intelligent than his farm animals. They are puppets of an unrelentingly inflated rhetoricism, numb to pain and immune to wit, that touches ground nowhere in common human experience.

People who like Rubens's paintings will love this show; the rest of us will be hard put not to like it. The drawings are consummate and informative (copies of Michelangelos and of ancient statuary reveal sources of Rubens's style), and they isolate exciting aspects of the artist's talent—notably a truthtelling realism that was not limited to oxen. Rhetoric-free portraits of a Korean man in native dress and of a Jesuit missionary in Chinese costume are clear-eyed confrontations with strangeness that, forgoing exoticism, have a tough, bracing humility. But heightened realism was just a subordinate means for Rubens, as it had been, slightly earlier, for Caravaggio, to accomplish the pictorial revolution of the seventeenth century: eclipsing Mannerism's distorted figures set in windowlike, perspectival recesses with rounded, convincing bodies in an airy space that opens outward, to envelop the viewer. Realistic imagery stabilizes the meringues of Italian and Northern Renaissance traditions with which he modelled the Baroque in grandiose, public, polemical glory. Today, most of us far prefer the taut, darkling Baroque of Caravaggio and his followers; but Rubens was the rage in that era, and he affected the development of the two best painters of the seventeenth century (and thus, in my view, of all time). As Simon Schama suggests, in his richly detailed book "Rembrandt's Eyes," the example of Rubens goaded Rembrandt—his younger would-be rival, barely ninety miles but a political world away, in Protestant Amsterdam—toward the revelation of a new social reality that was as personal, dramatic, and profound as Rubens's artificial paradise was unfelt and arbitrary. And in the years 1628-29, when Rubens was in Madrid to promote a treaty between Spain and England, he coached the rising court painter Diego Velázquez. Like Rembrandt, Velázquez would comb the bombast from Rubens's formal innovations and apply them to a lived circumstance—in his case, that of a refined and cruel Spanish monarchy on the brink of decline.

Painters of my acquaintance dote on Rubens. They readily look past his subject matter to his form and his technique. What Rubens says may not be compelling, but he says it with an unsurpassed eloquence. The art historian Jacqueline Lichtenstein has written, "Standing before the paintings of the great colorists, a viewer has the impression that his eyes are fingers." So it is with Rubens, who equalled Titian—a painter he came to revere in his twenties, during a decisive, eight-year sojourn in Italy—at merging color with imagined textures of flesh and fabric. Also superb are his compositions, which, no matter how teeming, are cunningly economical. Take a detour at the show to the Met's permanent collection and look at Rubens's "Wolf and Fox Hunt"—a stupendous collision of wolves, fox, dogs, horses, and weapon-wielding people which appears chaotic at first but sorts out beautifully, keeping a dozen or so bravura details (note the crazed wolf biting the blade of a spear) in spruce, interlocking order.

On the advice of an artist friend, I tried for a while to regard Rubens's art as a force of nature, no more reproachable for its mindlessness than are summer clouds, or a waterfall. This futile exercise convinced me that the Rubenesque is, on the contrary, a force of will. More concocted than cultivated, it has the weakness of all "international styles," from Hellenism to the modernistic: the exaggeration of generally admired qualities, absent the grit of a particular culture or personality. I suspect that Rubens attracts painters precisely because his style, being synthetic, presents no integral, daunting mystery. It looks like something you might almost learn to do.

A telling fact about Rubens is the character of his reliance on workshop assistants, which went beyond what I know of any other Old Master. A Danish visitor to his studio in 1621 reported seeing "many young painters who worked on different pieces on which Sr. Rubens had drawn with chalk and put a spot of color here and there; the young men had to execute these paintings which were then finished off with lines and colors added by Rubens himself." That is, Rubens provided designs at the start and tweakings at the end while ceding the middle, critical stage of a painting, in which, through innumerable decisions and unplanned impulses, thought and feeling become form. He seems to have especially relished the finishing part. (The show includes a few of the hundreds of often fine drawings by earlier artists that Rubens collected and made his own by summarily retouching.) He plainly believed, as did his contemporaries, that he had devised a literally foolproof manner, and he self-replicated to a degree that would be brazened by no other major artist until Andy Warhol—who positively valued, as an aesthetic sensation, the deadening effect of proxy hands in a work's execution. Rubens's sole excuse was efficiency.

There is no deadness anywhere in the Met show, just a somewhat enervating variety in types of liveliness. Who was Rubens? He never tells. As I've indicated, I like him best when he is effectively no one, just an attentive eye. (Three drawings of lions, made from life, miss nothing about those creatures but their sound and smell.) The rest is ravishment, with something dodgy in it. My keen enjoyment of a sheet of seventeen studies of dancing peasants for a relatively late painting, "Village Wedding" (1635-38), is vitiated by a sense that Rubens was trying not only to emulate his great predecessor Pieter Bruegel the Elder but to outdo him. (The painting, which hangs in the Louvre, is delightful enough, but vulgar in a way that's endemic to big-budget remakes of classic films.) As for Rubens's scrumptious portrait drawings—and even the special case of a staggeringly beautiful study for a saint's head, "Young Woman Looking Down" (1628)—there is always something arch about them. Their charm, not allowed to speak for itself, must be augmented with enlarged eyes and rosy, translucent, perfect skin.

Besides foreshadowing Warhol, Rubens amounted to the Walt Disney of his day—a hardworking industrialist of standardized pleasures. He not only ran his studio as a virtual assembly line; he oversaw the mass production of prints, based on his paintings, and a luxury line in tapestries, for which he provided cartoons. Given the magnificence of his success, there's little wonder that he lacked the shadier, more refractory genius of a Caravaggio, a Rembrandt, or a Velázquez. He was too happy. There is a sublimity about Rubens, after all. It just doesn't quite belong to him, but to a world and a time that made such art, and such a life, possible. ♦

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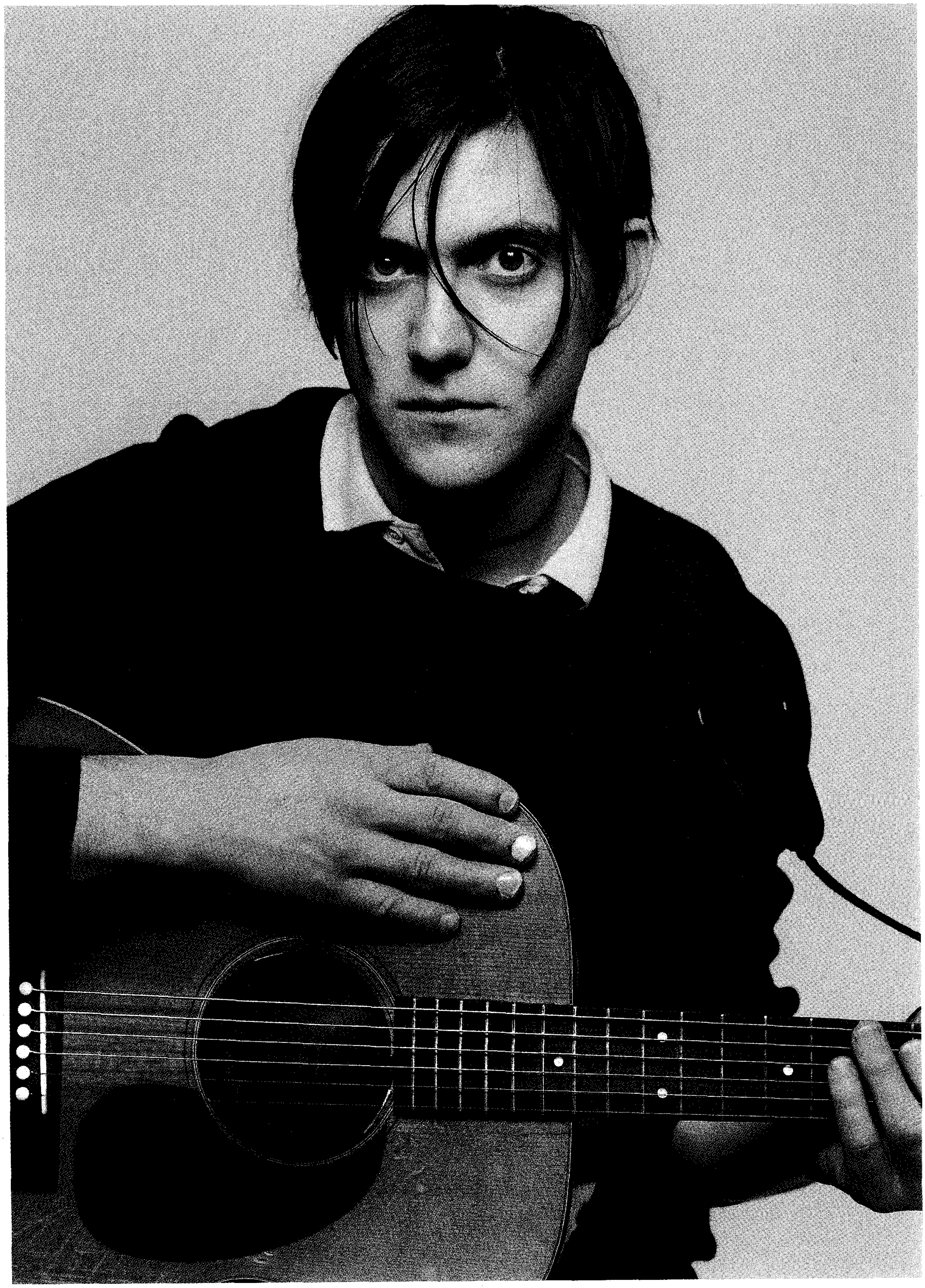


Conor Oberst's wobbling voice and overstuffed couplets call to mind late-night dorm-room epiphanies. Photograph by Craig McDean.

POP MUSIC

NEW MORNING

Indie rock's reigning poet-prince.

BY SASHA FRERE-JONES

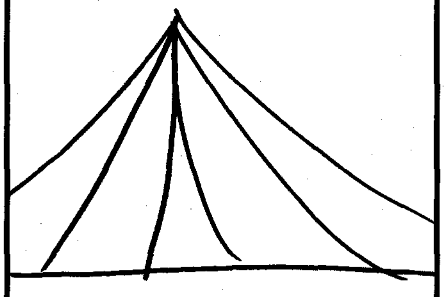
There are three things that people often say about Conor Oberst, the singer, songwriter, and only permanent member of the band Bright Eyes. One is that he started his musical career when he was thirteen. Another is that he is the new Bob Dylan. And the third is that he is not unpopular with the women who attend his shows. Oberst did begin recording at thirteen, and he was touring three years later, while still in high school and living with his parents in Omaha, Nebraska. Oberst's own label, Saddle Creek, which he formed with his brother and a friend when he was seventeen, has seized on his youth as a promotional asset. A sticker on the 2002 album "Lifted or The Story Is in the Soil, Keep Your Ear to the Ground" declared, "Conor Oberst owns a voice that quakes with the tumultuous energy that only youth can produce."

This isn't just sales talk. At the age of twenty-four, Oberst is delicate and skinny, with the long face and rumpled corduroys of someone who is preparing to be fifteen forever. Many of his songs—there are already more than a hundred—deal with the states of high dudgeon that are native to teen-agers everywhere: extreme heartbreak, extreme moral disapproval, extreme sadness. His wobbling voice and overstuffed couplets call to mind late-night dorm-room epiphanies, those moments when, drunk on cheap wine and the excitement of a new crush, you realize that nobody means anyone else any good, that companies care only about profit, but that you and me, babe, we can make it through the night—though I will probably be showing off in the wee morning light. Babe.

This sense of being let down by the world at a young age may remind people of Dylan. Or maybe the comparison came about because Oberst plays an acoustic guitar and sings songs with lots of words, sometimes in Dylan's cadence. In fact, Oberst is not very much like Dylan, but the differences between them are instructive. Dylan is armor-plated, even when singing about love; Oberst is permanently open to pain, wonder, and confusion. Dylan gives voice to thoughts so dense that he himself might not understand them all; Oberst is content to tackle hope and heartbreak—and, increasingly now, politics—in accessible, occasionally sententious language. Dylan fled the Midwest and invented a person who seemed to come from nowhere; Oberst moved to an apartment in the East Village a year and a half ago but still spends a third of his time in Omaha, where Saddle Creek is based. He talks freely to reporters and is exactly as charming as the girls who scream "I love you, Conor!" hope he is. Oberst has not transformed rock music. (If there were a "new Bob Dylan," he would make people uncomfortable right away, attack the world with a pickaxe, and refuse to say he's sorry. He would probably not be a musician.) Oberst is simply more talented, and more prolific, than the average songwriter.

Last week, Bright Eyes released "I'm Wide Awake, It's Morning" and "Digital Ash in a Digital Urn," the band's fifth and sixth albums. "I'm Wide Awake," the stronger of the two, was recorded quickly, with some songs done live in one take, and generally resembles Oberst's earlier work. "Digital Ash," which was created using a combination of electronic sources (such as keyboards and programmed samples) and traditional instruments, represents something of a departure. On both albums, the songs move at a fairly brisk pace and shy away from grand pronouncements. It's a blessing that Oberst has cut back on fortune-cookie lines like "Your eyes must do some raining if you are ever going to grow" (from "Lifted"). But platitudes are an occupational hazard for a songwriter who specializes in gauging the human heart. If Oberst sometimes mistakes his

To Picador
Happy 10th Birthday
From Anita Diamant



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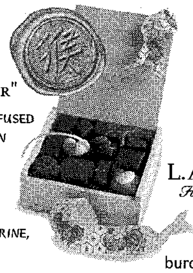

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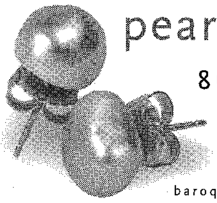

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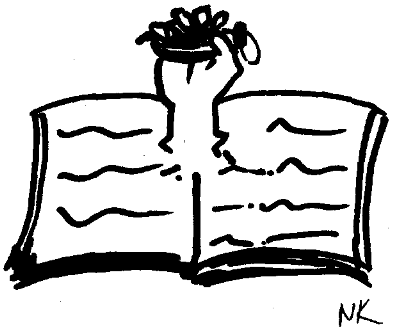

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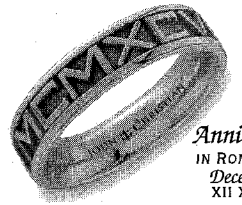

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private turmoil for the universal condition, it is not simply because he is young; he understands that pop songs need to overstate the case, to howl, to make a moment last because there might not be another like it. The outsize emotions are still there, but now they're delivered in a more compressed, catchier form.

Two songs from the albums, "Lua" and "Take It Easy (Love Nothing)," were released as singles last November. Within a week, they were No. 1 and No. 2, respectively, on the Billboard Hot 100 Singles Sales chart, an uncommon feat for independent rock releases. (The chart is based solely on sales and does not reflect radio play.) "Take It Easy," from "Digital Ash," is taut and upbeat. Oberst is falling in love again: "You took off your clothes, left on the light. You stood there so brave. You used to be shy." But in the next verse his lover leaves him a note: "Don't take it so bad, it is nothing you did. It is just once something dies you can't make it live. You are a beautiful boy. You're a sweet little kid but I am a woman." It's a canny maneuver. Oberst wants us to know that, kid or not, he's getting around, and, at the same time, that he's still as vulnerable as he was when he had to yell in order to speak.

"Lua," from "I'm Wide Awake," is the quietest song on either record, just a very soft guitar and Oberst singing. It is a blue, but not regretful, story of a night that never ends: "Julie knows a party at some actor's West Side loft. Supplies are endless in the evening, by the morning they'll be gone." Just when Oberst begins to sound jaded, he drops the conceit: "When everything is lonely I can be my own best friend. I get a coffee and the paper; have my own conversations with sidewalk and pigeons and my window reflection." He lingers delightfully on the word "conversations," making his banal morning ritual sound as pleasurable as the previous night's adventure.

Last Tuesday, the day the albums were released, Bright Eyes performed the first of three shows at Town Hall. Oberst, in a tight white tennis shirt and sagging jeans, was in an affectionate mood. He whispered with his bandmates, and at one point gently nuzzled his bass player's shoulder. The set was made up almost entirely of songs from "I'm Wide Awake," and Mike Mogis, on pedal-steel guitar, and Nate Walcott, on trumpet, gave the music an unexpectedly big and colorful shape. Midway through the show, the band left the stage, and Oberst performed alone. "I was so moved by the President's inauguration speech last week that I wrote this song," he announced. To the evening's loudest applause, he sang "When the President Talks to God," a fierce synthesis of accusation and repetition which recalled Dylan's early protest songs: "When the President talks to God, does he ever think maybe he's not, that the voice is just inside his head? As he kneels next to the presidential bed, does he ever smell his own bullshit, when the President talks to God?"

The show ended with a rowdy version of "Road to Joy," a song from "I'm Wide Awake" that neatly ties together Oberst's many concerns. Based on the melody of Beethoven's "Ode to Joy," the song unfolds like a march, even though Oberst seems to be retreating into himself: "I have my drugs. I have my woman. They keep away my loneliness. My parents, they have their religion, but sleep in separate houses." Gradually, his voice falls into step with the music, and his words become harsh and sarcastic: "So when you're asked to fight a war that's over nothing, it's best to join the side that's going to win. And no one's sure how all of this got started, but we're going to make them goddamn certain how it's going to end." Riled, Oberst turns the anger back on himself: "I could have been a famous singer, if I had someone else's voice. But failure's always sounded better, let's fuck it up, boys. Make some noise." The band obliges with a burst of horns and galloping drums. But Oberst knows that the lyric is implausible. After all, he *is* a famous singer. So, perhaps to convince himself, and his fans, that he's an ordinary guy trying to find his place in the world, he reprises the song's opening lines, this time screaming them: "The sun came up with no conclusions. Flowers sleeping in their beds. The city cemetery's humming. I'm wide awake, it's morning." ♦

CORRECTION OF THE WEEK

From the Winston-Salem (N.C.) Journal.

Because of a transcription error, a Nov. 28 letter to the editor from Joseph Cutri said that Jesus was an Orthodox Jew. It should have said that Jesus was an unorthodox Jew.

THE CURRENT CINEMA

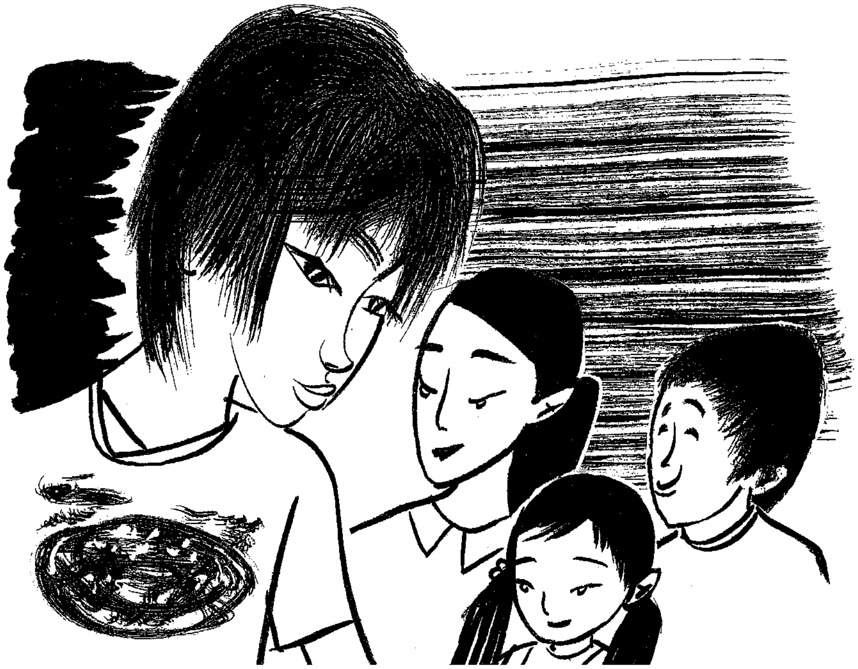
GUILT AND INNOCENTS

"Nobody Knows" and "Turtles Can Fly."

BY ANTHONY LANE

If the Japanese director Hirokazu Kore-eda hadn't gone into the movie business, he would have made a great botanist. The evidence is plain to see in his latest film, "Nobody Knows." It is there in the photosynthetic feel for the fluctuations of available light; in the close attention paid to the minor components of which people and things are made (we see as many hands and feet as we do faces); and in the plants that sprout, with varying degrees of success, throughout the film. The greenery is tended by four siblings: Akira (Yûya Yagira), who is twelve; his sister Kyoko (Ayu Kitaura), who is younger but looks older; and two little ones—Shigeru (Hiei Kimura), "the noisy boy," and Yuki (Momoko Shimizu), an almost silent girl. They live in a cramped Tokyo apartment with their mother, if you can call her that. (She is played by an actress named simply "You," which may give English-speaking women a nasty turn.) In the dying hours of the day, she will come home from work, or wherever, and ruffle a child's hair, but she's more likely to enthuse over a new boyfriend. This comes as no surprise, since the kids' paternity is ominously vague. When Akira tracks down Yuki's father, a taxi-driver, the guy sits and plays with his cell phone, pausing only to ask whether the child resembles him. This movie is not a man's world.

At last, with a scrap of farewell, the mother leaves. Money infrequently comes in the mail, and there are promises to return, but those are made to be broken, like children's toys. Akira, desperate to keep the family together, takes charge; the remainder of the movie charts the slow, rueful erosion of his efforts. The apartment was meant to house only one child, so the other three were smuggled inside, the two youngest in suitcases, and nobody but Akira is allowed to appear on the balcony or go shopping for food. It is not until halfway through the story that the rest of the kids dare to emerge and sniff the air. When Yuki is taken out for a birthday walk, after dark, she identifies objects in the shops with the thrilled bemusement of an interplanetary guest, still grappling with human speech: "Broccoli. Cups. Plates." This is ideal territory for Kore-eda, who likes to register the visible world as if it were still new, its impact so fresh as to be painful. Hence, earlier in the film, the scarlet polish that the mother, drunk and clumsy, paints on Kyoko's nails. The camera notes a last tiny speck, and, after that, a dim stain on the floor where some of the varnish spilled—the sole remaining clue to a woman who might as well have passed away.



A twelve-year-old boy tries to keep his family together in Hirokazu Kore-eda's movie.

In Kore-eda's best film, "After Life" (1998), the characters *had* passed away. We followed a series of interviews with the recently dead, who sat at desks in a shabby office, staffed by eager young bureaucrats, and tried to resurrect the instants of happiness from their lives. The movie was like a prose poem, unfanciful and buoyant, and you couldn't decide whether the sharp, wintry keenness of its perceptions was a cause for hope or regret. That particularity survives in "Nobody Knows," yet the new work can't help suffering by comparison. Two hours and twenty-one minutes is a long haul for a tale of plotless decline, and when Kore-eda does spring a coincidence on us—Akira, a baseball nut, is called upon to join a local team while lounging against a fence—the contrivance juts out and jars. The climax has a quiet ghoulishness, and we are encouraged to believe that the children are now so enfeebled and drained that horror will pass them by, but once again you feel a director overplaying his hand. Nobody can mistake the tranquil beauty of Kore-eda's scenes, but the trouble with tranquil beauty is that if the dose is too high it leaves you tranquillized.

Yet that is not the end of the affair. I certainly came out of "Nobody Knows" feeling numb; only later, reflecting on the fact that the movie was inspired by a true story, did it occur to me that the numbness could have been deliberate, and that what suffused this picture was a mist of anger. Did Kore-eda want his audience, whether here or in Japan, to feel chastised, or perturbed, at the sight of well-mannered children fighting to maintain the veneer of orderly lives? Is the problem really that nobody knew of that attempt, or that nobody gave a damn, or, worst of all, that nobody thought it strange?

February has clearly been designated Abandoned Children Month. In the wake of "Nobody Knows" comes "Turtles Can Fly," written and directed by Bahman Ghobadi, which takes the plight of the parentless to a harsher and less dreamy level of devastation. We are in Iraq, on the brink of the American invasion. To be specific, we are in the Kurdish enclaves of northern Iraq, in the makeshift villages and refugee camps that are the flotsam left by years of Iraqi suppression. Nobody seems to be in charge here—nobody, at any rate, from the adult population. We see a schoolteacher, but he's a dithering naïf. We see village elders, but they just sit around and grumble. As for aid workers—forget it. Basically, this is a job for Satellite.

His actual name is Kak (Soran Ebrahim), but his friends and dependents—and that includes everybody—call him Satellite, because what they desire most is not food or shelter but news, and among Satellite's incalculable gifts is a capacity to haggle and hassle in the markets, then come home dragging a satellite dish. There's a wonderful moment when he tunes in the television for the elders, who flinch at the first flicker of what looks like MTV, one frame of which is enough to affront a dozen strictures of the Muslim faith. Still, it is worth enduring the wailings of the infidel Beyoncé or the devil that is Timberlake if the villagers can get word that the Americans—of the heavily armed rather than the skimpily dressed variety—are coming. The movie revolves around a curious historical anomaly: looking forward to war.

Satellite is thirteen, pushy, and bespectacled. He has friends, but his one true love is a racing bike, festooned with ribbons and trumpets. It's like a silly prop from a Jacques Tati film, and it joins the list of unlikely objects and daunting juxtapositions that pepper the landscape of the picture, starting with the throng of youngsters patiently working their way, unsupervised, up a grassy hillside. They carry baskets on their backs, and you find yourself craning to see what's inside. Flowers? Fragrant mushrooms? No, the children are harvesting land mines, which, if unexploded, will fetch a fair price. With that one detail, we get the bottom line of the movie. From now on, in this booby-trapped world, everything that we hold dear about raising offspring will be thrown out. These kids will raise themselves. We take it on trust that they are orphans, though we learn nothing of the sunderings in question, and the kids themselves seem to have lost interest in their savage past, preferring to focus on tomorrow's crop of mines.

The heroine, or leading victim, of "Turtles Can Fly" is Agrin (Avaz Latif), who is fifteen, though she has the ageless air of the unmendably traumatized. She has one brother who has stumps for arms, and another who is blind. The problem is that, as we discover, the second of these is not a brother at all but Agrin's son, born of a rape by Iraqi soldiers. Such is her shame at this event that she makes repeated efforts to abandon the child, or worse. (We may balk at this, fondly imagining maternal love to be a constant of every culture, but we could also read it as a rebuke, as if the movie were telling us: your imaginations have an easy life.) All of which sounds so hellish that a lesser director would end up floundering in hyperbole, or in comedy as black as tar. What Ghobadi does, to stabilize the mood, is follow the example of his characters—if children can treat their sufferings with a level gaze, he implies, then we owe it to them to do the same. Even so, the image of the blind boy reaching for a necklace strung with bullets, or howling into a stack of empty shell casings—the only playground open to the children being a rusty graveyard of spent military hardware—may leave some viewers almost unable to cope.

You could argue that such flayed feelings are too easily summoned; would Ghobadi get the same effect from a campful of grownups? The response embodied in the film is that when a stateless people is ground down it is the children who spill out and scatter. (Ghobadi is an Iranian Kurd, and one lesson of his film is that Kurdish identity is stronger by far than the patronage of a particular country.) Moreover, in comparison with "Nobody Knows," "Turtles Can Fly" has little space for mawkishness, and the kids are far too cussed to be cute. It is, in every sense, the more immediate achievement: it hits and hurts the eyes (the rainy days are lousy enough, but the skies of royal blue, above such grief, feel especially insulting), and it also seems to bleed straight out of the headlines. The movie closes with American troops arriving in Kurdish territory—the one area where they enjoyed an unambiguous welcome—not just with proclamations of peace but with something even more profound. The villagers, as a friend tells Satellite, are up on the hill, "watching the prohibited channels with American soldiers." Makes you proud. ♦

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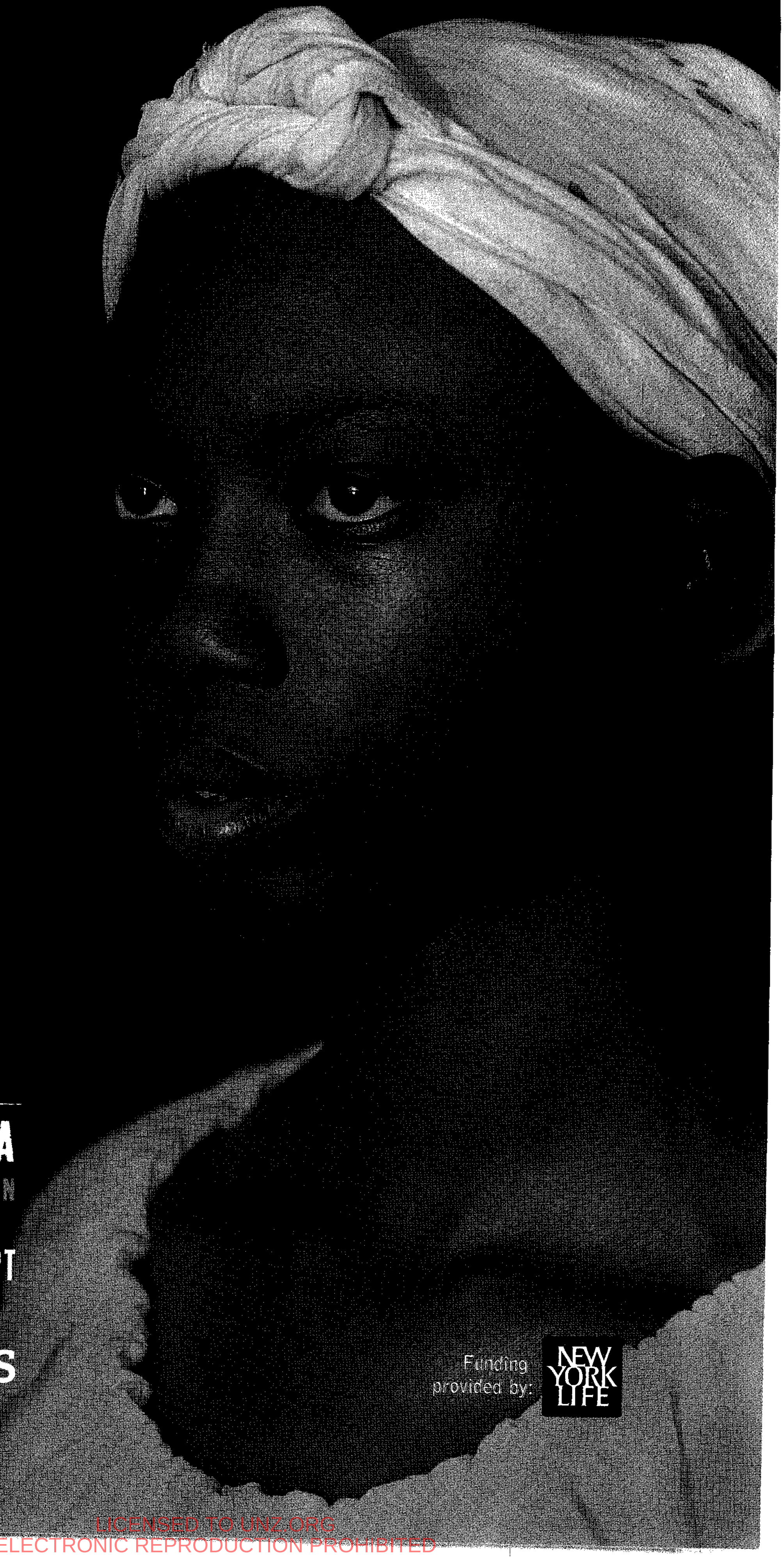

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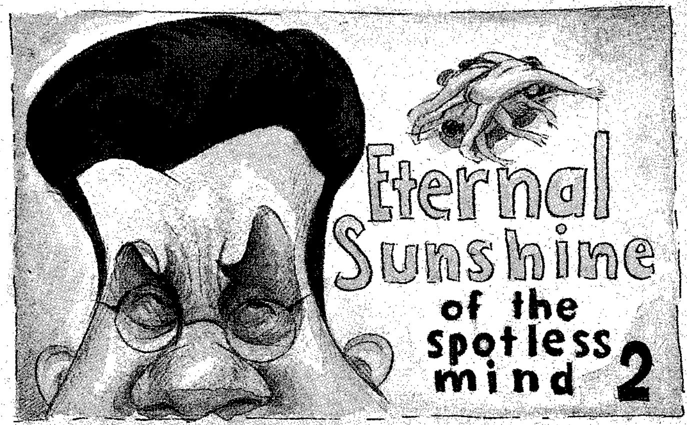
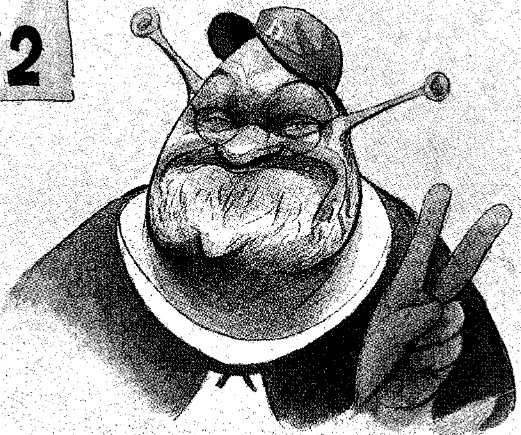
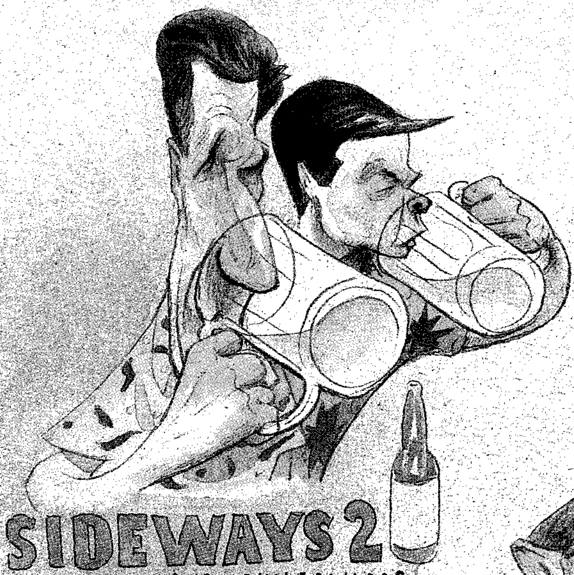

Eternal Sunshine of the spotless mind 2

ALBERTO GONZALES AGREES, FOR THE SAKE OF A FRIEND, TO FORGET EVERYTHING.

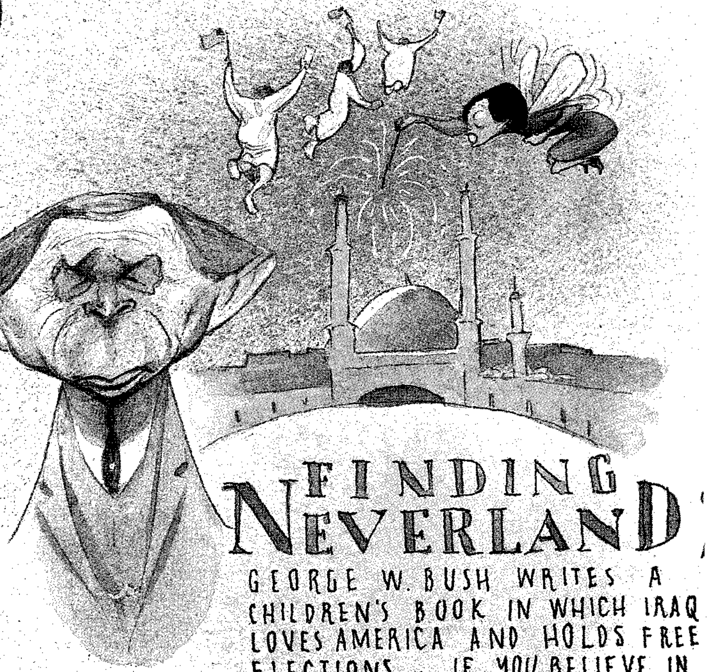
SHREK 3

MICHAEL MOORE DISCOVERS THAT EVEN A HUGE TROLL CAN BECOME A BIG MOVIE STAR.





JOHN KERRY AND JOHN EDWARDS STAR AS TWO DRIFTERS WHO GIVE UP LATTE IN SEARCH OF THE PERFECT COORS.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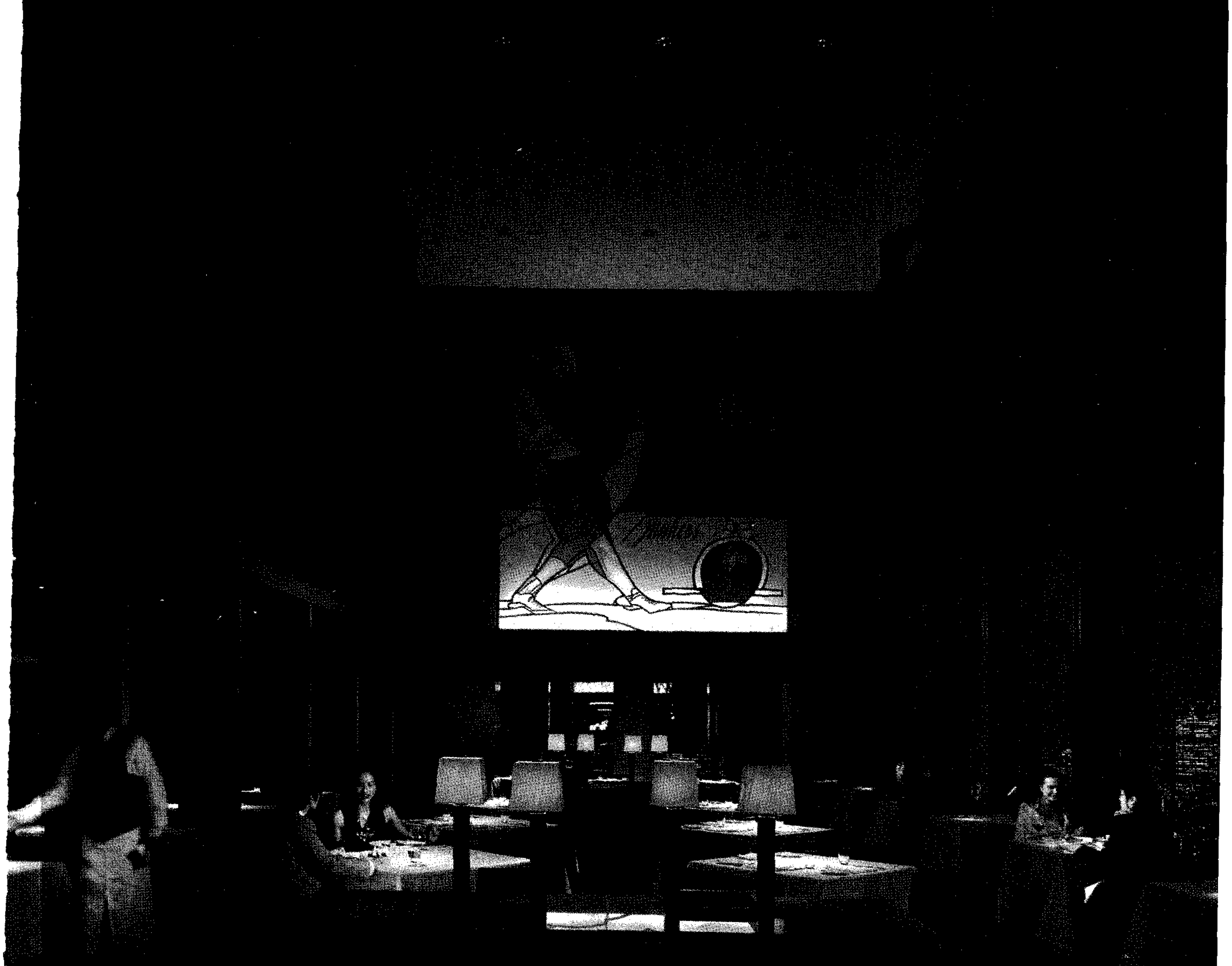

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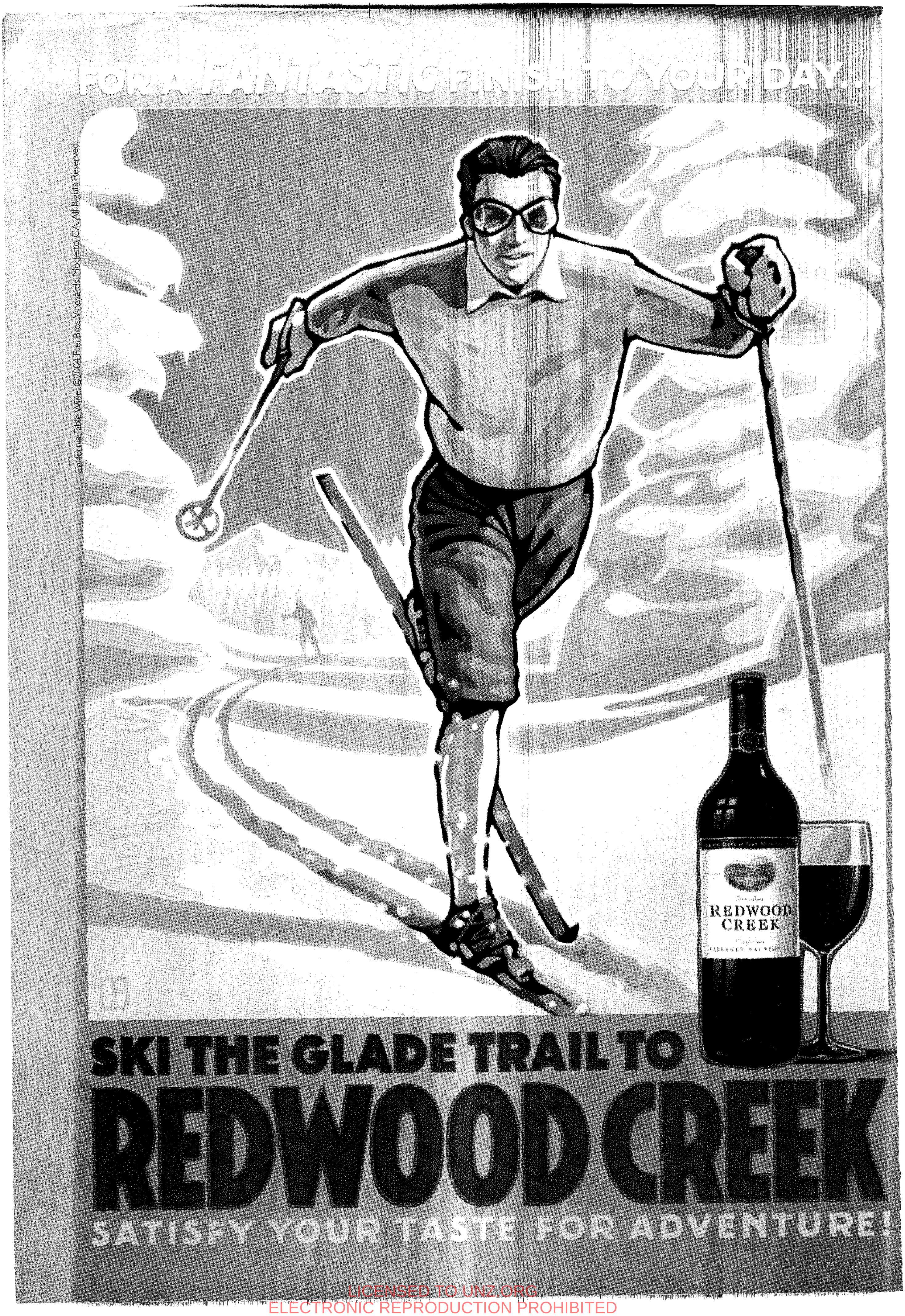
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